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THE NEW REPUBLIC

July 12, 1999

SECRETARY OF WAR

Madeleine Albright and the politics of personal history

By ROGER COHEN

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CORRESPONDENCE

Standing by her man

TO THE EDITORS:
I'm neither a New Yorker nor Hillary Clinton's biggest fan, but I found something troubling in Michelle Cottle's article ("The Wrong Race," June 7). Doubtless it's true that Hillary Clinton's conversion from controversial politician to traditional first lady made her more palatable to some, but do we really want to discourage her from running for the Senate on the grounds that her new supporters "would be less than impressed if she left her man alone in the White House in order to stump around the New York countryside"?

Such arguments are frequently used against strong and controversial female politicians everywhere. Likewise, shunting Hillary aside is not going to make Al Gore or the Democratic Party any more popular, but it will represent a victory for the Republican right, which, however irrationally, has lavished its hatred on her and her husband.

MARTIN J. GIDRON
Frederick, Maryland

TO THE EDITORS:
Recently, Barbara Boxer—a strong supporter of Hillary Clinton's senatorial run—was asked to name something important that the first lady had accomplished. The clearly befuddled senator managed to do what all good politicians do: she seemed to answer the question without really answering the question.

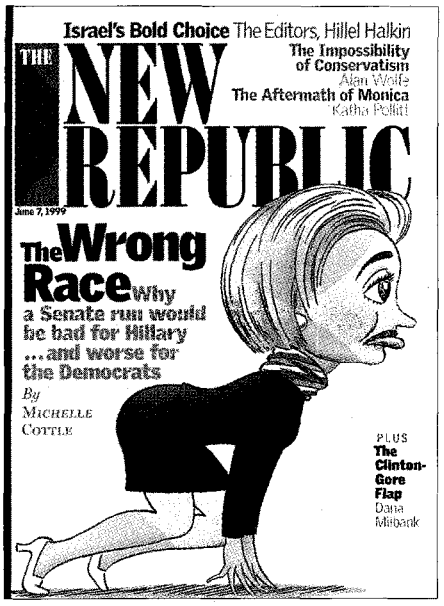
Similarly, Michelle Cottle's article has numerous complimentary quotes by the first lady's supporters and fans but not one single quote about an important accomplishment. Cottle informs us that the first lady's "favorable ratings didn't skyrocket until she stopped being a strong, independent feminist and became a devoted wife." I know Hillary has managed to hold her marriage together despite her husband's cheating, his lying to her about his cheating, and his duping her into lying for him before a worldwide audience. But just what has she accomplished?

JOHN ANSALDI
Yorktown Heights, New York

Conservatism and its discontents

TO THE EDITORS:
Alan Wolfe's "The Revolution That Never Was" could hardly be more wrong (June 7). Let me count the ways:

American conservatism, contrary to what Wolfe suggests, has no significant roots in European conservatism. Most


Israel's Bold Choice The Editors, Hillel Halkin
The Impossibility of Conservatism
Alan Wolfe
The Aftermath of Monica
Katha Pollitt
THE NEW REPUBLIC
June 7, 1999
The Wrong Race Why a Senate run would be bad for Hillary ...and worse for the Democrats
By Michelle Cottle
PLUS The Clinton-Gore Flap
Dana Milbank

American conservatives, I suspect, have not read and would not recognize Michael Oakeshott or Leo Strauss. For most of American politics is a debate within liberalism—bounded by the perspectives of the French and Scottish Enlightenment.

What Wolfe calls the "near complete collapse of conservative government in the United States" seems inconsistent with a Republican majority in Congress and among the state governors.

Wolfe writes that "conservatives seemed congenitally unable to write significant books," but he overlooks the contributions by James Buchanan, Milton Friedman, and Thomas Sowell and marginalizes those by Friedrich von Hayek and James Q. Wilson.

Wolfe writes that "conservatives in America have been unable to come up with any sustained and significant ideas," but the broad and growing support for constitutional government, school choice, Social Security privatization, sound money, and welfare reform all developed from a conservative base.

Wolfe writes that "conservative think tanks destroyed any possibility of serious intellectual work," but he has this story backward; conservative think tanks have thrived, in part, because the hegemony of the left in American universities has reduced their potential for serious intellectual work on many issues. On a per scholar basis, the output of many conservative think tanks compares favorably with that of most universities.

Finally, as the (aging) chairman of a libertarian think tank, I find the most irritating of Wolfe's broadsides is that "[l]ibertarianism is a political philosophy for Peter Pans, an outlook on the world premised on never growing up." Libertarianism is a political philosophy, not a comprehensive philosophy, and it is fully compatible with a mature conservatism in one's personal life.

WILLIAM A. NISKANEN
Cato Institute
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITORS:
Although Alan Wolfe may be correct that mine are the politics of "hopeless rage," the examples given prove nothing of the kind. Contrary to what is suggested, I do not swoon over the "authors of *The Bell Curve*" but object to the pathologization of dissent practiced by its critics, in TNR and elsewhere. Unlike Wolfe, I do not writhe squeamishly at the mention of Murray and Herrnstein but have expressed methodological reservations (see *Society*, December 1998) about the value of IQ test results. I do not "explain away the anti-Semitism of Jean-Marie Le Pen" but note the role of his opponents in exaggerating both his distaste for Jews and his radical rightist agenda.

Moreover, the National Front includes Jews among its voters and in leadership positions. Le Pen's tactless outbursts, most often made after being mercilessly baited by representatives of the French media, have also been ominously used by the French left to introduce harsh penalties against the expression of insensitive thoughts. Proponents of the *Loi Gayssot*, passed against "crimes of opinion" by the French Assembly in 1990, invoked raging *frontistes* to make it a crime to engage in "illiberal" writings and speech. Most important, in drawing necessary historical distinctions, National Front politicians are not interchangeable with interwar European extreme nationalists, who called for stripping Jews of their civil rights.

Whether the League of the South is "racist" or not, a charge denied repeatedly on its website and in its newsletter, has nothing to do with the validity of designating it as a "regionalist populist movement." My point in discussing the league, in any case, was not to justify its unproved racism but to underscore the weakness in the United States of regionally based populist movements.

Wolfe creates a misleading impression when he accuses me of misrepresenting Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and himself as "socialists." Professor Fox-Genovese was in all likelihood a social democrat at the time she made the comments to which I refer. She has since modified her views and wrote a long, gracious blurb for my book. The same time-and-circumstance qualifica-

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tion applies likewise to my references to Elshtain and Wolfe. In the last case, the judgment was an unflattering characterization taken from Christopher Lasch. It is also disconcerting, in view of the subject of more than half my book, to learn that I make "no attempt to apply the tools of analytic philosophy to an examination of liberalism's incoherence." From the opening chapter on, I apply precisely those tools to demonstrate my central argument: that twentieth-century liberalism has expanding agendas but no real continuity with that older bourgeois movement it replaced and whose name it took.

Wolfe likes his liberalism better than mine. Indeed, he sees his worldview as firmly "embedded" in our way of life and "progressing" all around us. While he is entitled to his tastes, never does he explain why his ill-defined liberalism is more "liberal" than the political view of James Fitzjames Stephen. Nor does he let on why an explicit preference for an older liberalism betrays a general hostility to liberal thinking. And I've no idea how my book "feasts off the liberalism it denounces." If that liberalism is that of our current custodians of hate-free opinions and depathologized thoughts, whether inside or outside the White House, I can only shout back: "Let my worst enemies enjoy such a feast!" Wolfe's attribution to me of an elegantly crafted critical comment on John Stuart Mill is highly appreciated but comes from that crusty English scholar Maurice Cowling. Would that I wrote as well as Cowling, another sympathetic interpreter of the real liberal article!

PAUL GOTTFRIED
Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania

ALAN WOLFE REPLIES:
Paul Gottfried writes this of Le Pen: "It is far from clear that he is the ferocious anti-Semite denounced in *Le Monde*." He then goes on to say that stories about Le Pen's nasty jokes about Jews were bandied about by his enemies and offers the guess that they "were not entirely accurate." Le Pen, we are also told, promotes an agenda of "Christian humanist classical liberalism." If that is not an effort to explain away this man's vile anti-Semitism, I have no idea what would qualify.

Gottfried could have described Fox-Genovese et al. as "former" socialists or social democrats. He does not. That he relied on Christopher Lasch to characterize my own views incorrectly could have been avoided by reading my book instead of relying on Lasch's treatment of it.

I never claim that Gottfried "swoons" all over *The Bell Curve*, merely that he defends it, which he does by attacking the book's critics without ever indicating that he has any methodological reservations about the book itself. By the way, he characterizes the views of the book's critics as "argumenta ad Hitlerum."

Gottfried is correct that the source for the description of Mill's views that I admired was Maurice Cowling.

Bimbroglio coda

TO THE EDITORS:
"After Virtue" by Katha Pollitt is a winner (June 7). Thanks to Pollitt and TNR for publishing it. It is great not because we are told something new but because we are told it so well—something your magazine seems to do more than most.

LEONARD EARL JOHNSON
New Orleans, Louisiana

TO THE EDITORS:
In her review of Monica Lewinsky's book, why does Katha Pollitt state that Clinton was impeached because of sex rather than perjury? Does she really believe that Clinton would not have been impeached if his lies under oath had been about some other subject, such as his finances or the suicide of Vince Foster? Does she really believe Clinton would have been impeached for having an affair with Lewinsky even if he had never lied under oath? If she believes either idea, she's nuts.

DOUGLAS SCZYGELSKI
Columbus, Ohio

TO THE EDITORS:
I had to express how much I enjoyed Katha Pollitt's article about the Lewinsky and Stephanopoulos books. Such intelligent writing and absolutely hilarious! I can't remember when I've laughed so often and so hard over an article. I read it over dinner and "MSNBC endless natterfest," "monomaniacal blather," and "she's a slob" practically choked me. The waitress couldn't believe I was getting all this enjoyment out of a magazine article.

LARRY JURRIST
Hollywood, Florida

TO THE EDITORS:
Go away, Bimbroglio. Go away, Ken Starr. Go away, Katha Pollitt. We're sick and tired of you.

GEORGE JOCHNOWITZ
Staten Island, New York

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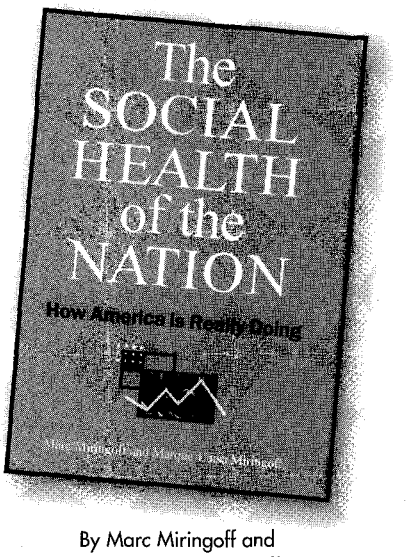

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

New Democrats

SOUTH AFRICA'S SECOND post-apartheid general election, held several weeks ago, turned into quite an intriguing affair, although you would hardly know it from the American press. The media focused on Nelson Mandela's retirement and his replacement by faithful lieutenant Thabo Mbeki—a story line that fits the fairy-tale narrative into which post-apartheid South Africa is so often shoehorned.

But, on the ground, real politics were taking place. In particular, the National Party, the party of F.W. de Klerk and of 50 years of apartheid, collapsed. Five years ago, when South Africa held its first multiracial contest, whites overwhelmingly voted N.P. and the party won 82 of the 400 seats in the parliament. De Klerk became Mandela's deputy president, and, when his party left the national unity government, it became the official opposition.

This time, the N.P. lost two-thirds of those seats, falling to 28. It would have dropped even further had it not (in an ironic twist) retained widespread support among "coloureds," the Afrikaans-speaking mixed-race population that it disenfranchised in the early years of apartheid. But whites deserted the N.P. en masse, switching overwhelmingly to the Democratic Party. The D.P., which won a mere seven seats in 1994, now boasts 38. Overnight, it has become the official parliamentary opposition and the primary voice of white South Africa. And, on the surface, that would seem like a very good thing.

The Democratic Party is synonymous, in South African parlance, with liberalism. Its leaders are the political heirs of Alan Paton and Helen Suzman—white South Africans who disliked apartheid because it trampled individual rights but suspected that the Marxist-aligned organizations fighting to overthrow it might be less than committed to those rights themselves. White South African liberals defended capitalism, opposed violent resistance, criticized apartheid's brutalities, and (their critics were quick to note) lived lives of apartheid privilege. A decade ago, most commentators on South African politics would have agreed with two propositions: first, that the liberals were basically decent people and, second, that they were basically irrelevant to South Africa's post-apartheid future.

It has not turned out that way. One reason is the implosion of white political alternatives. Despite rechristening itself the New National Party, the party that conceived and implemented apartheid has been unable to shed its historical baggage. Blacks continue to despise the N.P. And more and more whites believe that the party's leaders, reared in an intellectually stultifying, patronage-laden political machine, lack the brains to effectively challenge the African National Congress's urbane, foreign-educated cadres.

Into the vacuum has stepped Tony Leon, the relentless, egocentric, razor-sharp D.P. leader. Leon, the scion of a prominent Jewish family from Durban, has banished all traces of the apologetic, self-effacing style that used to characterize white South African liberalism. In its place, he has created a slick, macho, American-style political movement with an uncanny ability to tap into white fears. While other white politicians have treated Mandela with deference, Leon has taken him on with the brio of a Southern African neocon, labeling Mandela as too beholden to South Africa's labor unions and its Communist Party. When Mandela invited Fidel Castro to address the South African parliament, Leon boycotted the session. When Mandela asked the D.P. to join the government, Leon refused, vowing that "we won't be muzzled." And Leon has charged the ANC with indifference and incompetence in the face of a crime epidemic that has left white South Africans in panic. His proposal: a state of emergency.

A state of emergency? Not exactly the most liberal of solutions, especially in a country that still remembers the brutal state of emergency that President P.W. Botha imposed in response to black protest in the mid-'80s. But this is the irony of the D.P.'s success. It has confounded the experts who said a liberal political party could never flourish on South African soil. Yet it has simultaneously proved them right—for, as the D.P. grows more popular, it is revealing just how illiberal South African liberalism can be. For all of its commitment to individual rights and clean government (a popular anecdote tells of a man who registers with the D.P. and announces that "I'm not going to vote for you, but I'm registering here because I don't trust any of the other parties with my registration form"), the D.P. has essentially become a party of white backlash. These are liberals who got carjacked. Leon wants a referendum on the reimposition of the death penalty. He protested the draping of green cloth over statues of apartheid leaders so they would not serve as a visual backdrop to Mbeki's inauguration. He condemns "reverse racism" as South Africa's biggest problem—an absurd charge in a country where whites have retained virtually all their wealth and where rates of racial inequality remain near the highest in the world. A D.P. slogan boasts that the party will "restore merit, justice, and honesty"; of course, for black South Africans, there is no history of "merit, justice, and honesty" to restore.

In short, the D.P. is liberal about everything except race. And black South Africans know it. In a poll last year, blacks rated Leon less favorably than every white South African politician except for neo-fascist Freedom Front leader Constand Viljoen. When Dr. Bukelwa Mbulawa, one of the D.P.'s precious few black leaders, left the party earlier this year, she called her former colleagues "the new custodians of popular right-wing politics.... Their only camouflage is their magical phrase 'liberalism.'"

Mbulawa joined the ANC, and it is true that, unlike the D.P., which has no real connection to black South Africa, the ANC is a marvel of genuine multiracial community. That is largely because its cadres, most of whom were exiled or jailed during apartheid, were cut off from their inherited communities and had to form new, ideological ones. People may fret that Mbeki surrounds himself with cronies, but they have to admit that those cronies come in all hues. (Mbeki is closer to Essop Pahad, an Indian South African who lived with him for decades in Britain, than he is to his own siblings.) But, unfortunately, part of what bonded the Africans, Indians, whites, and "coloureds" who joined the ANC during apartheid was Marxism. And, although the orthodox variety is no longer fashionable, many ANC leaders intuitively support centralized governmental power and view individual rights as a barrier to economic transformation. In short, if the D.P. is liberal about everything except race, the ANC is liberal about nothing but. These are the mirror images that will structure politics in the wake of South Africa's second free national election, an election in which liberalism won big and lost big at the same time.

PETER BEINART

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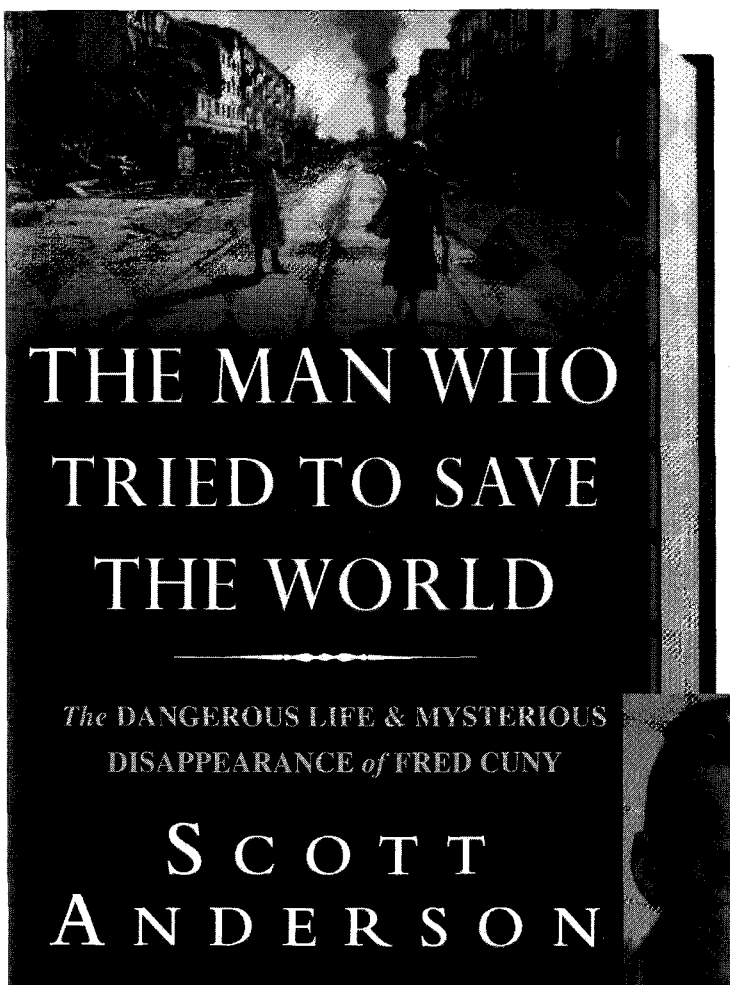

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ON THE HILL

Losing It

POOR TRENT LOTT. Three years into his stint as majority leader, the legendary control freak is still struggling to impose order on the senatorial circus. It's not as if he hasn't tried. Early in his tenure, the fastidious gentleman from Mississippi drew scattered snickers when he implemented a dress code for Senate staffers and decreed that colleagues would henceforth be expected to call before dropping by his office. But etiquette changes can provide only so much comfort in an organization in which a lone senator can logjam legislation on a whim and a debate on tort reform can morph suddenly into a battle over pornography or school prayer. As one anonymous senator told *The Washington Post* back in '97, "Trent likes to control and manage ... but the Senate is a collection of 100 independent people who don't always like to be controlled and managed."

Deep down, the majority leader must pine for his days in the House. Sure, the offices are shabbier and the partisanship even more shrill. But, institutionally speaking, the House understands a little something about the importance of control. For one thing, the speaker can ram through legislation with a simple majority vote. Better yet, the Rules Committee keeps a tight rein on which bills come to the floor, how long debate will last, and what sorts of amendments can be attached.

Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that Lott has spent the past several months trying to make the Senate operate more like the House. Through a variety of procedural maneuvers, the majority leader has devised a system for holding debate to a minimum and ensuring that members of both parties have little chance to clutter up bills with cumbersome amendments. In the process, he has managed to get both sides of the aisle sniping about his management skills.

For starters, Democrats complain that the majority leader is keeping an iron grip on the calendar, larding the schedule with conference reports and unamendable vehicles that don't allow for open debate. As for amendable legislation, Democrats charge that Lott has appointed himself a one-man Rules Committee. "He will not bring up a bill unless he knows exactly what's coming," gripes one Democratic aide. "He always wants to know, 'What will the amendments be? How many? How long will you take on them? When can I move on to something else?' All these things need to be answered before he's even willing to bring up the bill."

In the "regular order" of the Senate, once a bill makes it to the floor, any member may propose any amendment—no matter how absurdly unrelated—to be followed by unlimited debate. While this is, admittedly, not the most efficient way to run a government, the Senate takes great pride in being the world's most deliberative body. Lott, not surprisingly, disapproves of such untidy digressions and has found a way to circumvent them by filing cloture on measures early and often and, for that extra dose of control, by employing an arcane procedure known as "filling the amendment tree." Roughly speaking, the process works like this: As majority leader, Lott has first dibs on amending any measure on the floor. Each bill may carry only a limited number of proposed amendments at any one time. By loading a bill with his own amendments, Lott blocks other senators from attaching theirs. Then, once the tree is filled, he calls for a cloture vote to end debate. The objective, his office explains, is to prevent important bills from getting bogged down by controversial amendments.

Unfortunately, while such maneuvering may soothe Lott's orderly soul, it in no way facilitates passage of legislation. Democrats are furious over what they regard as his attempt to run the Senate "as a dictatorship." Minority Leader Tom Daschle has convened emergency meetings to urge his party members to vote against cloture in the name of protecting the minority party's rights. So far, he's managed to deny Lott the 60 votes needed for cloture in every instance. In such cases, Lott has had little choice but to delay action until another day.

Republicans, understandably, are less perturbed by Lott's micromanagement. But even they occasionally run up against their leader's need for control—most memorably during last October's budget battle. Rather than hash out unpleasant spending details on the Senate floor, Lott and his staff locked themselves away for eight days of private haggling with representatives from Newt Gingrich's staff and the White House—much to the displeasure of their Republican colleagues. "Negotiations were conducted behind closed doors, out of sight of the public, as well as the vast majority of the members of Congress," groused Senator John McCain, denouncing the entire process as "deplorable." Republican anger over both Lott's imperious handling of the process and the contents of the final bill prompted rumblings that the majority leader was on his way out the door à la Gingrich.

Lott survived, but his leadership skills remain under fire. Democrats grow ever more obsessed with his procedural shenanigans: the minority leader's office has gone so far as to put together a report noting that, among other acts of parliamentary heavy-handedness, Lott has filled the tree and filed cloture on the very first day of a measure's consideration at least three times since March. (While that may not seem like much, the Congressional Research Service notes that this procedure was used only three times between 1989 and 1994, and under different circumstances; in each case a cloture vote was immediately taken by unanimous consent.) The Democrats' frustration has begun to spill out onto the floor. In late April, when Lott filled the tree on the Y2K bill, Daschle turned snippy: "I have a great deal of affection for the majority leader, but I must say, I think he should have run for speaker because I really believe he would be more comfortable as speaker."

From a parochial point of view, Lott's members should be pleased about such machinations. By barring Democrats from introducing amendments, Lott can protect his caucus not just from risking a policy defeat—such as the thrashing Republicans took when Lott was pressured to bring gun control to the floor—but from even having to vote on controversial issues. If Lott can get a bill passed without allowing Democrats to bring up their policy aims, fabulous. If not, Republicans can blame the minority for holding up the train.

Ultimately, however, Lott may be doing his party a disservice. By their own admission, the Republicans have come unglued in the message department: Democrats have co-opted pet issues such as crime, the right wing is running amok, and GOP legislators can't even agree on a plan to cut taxes—the party's only articulated policy aim. If ever there was a time to focus on the big picture, this is it. Yet Lott seems to be hoping that, if he can just get a handle on the procedural details, he can camouflage the fact that his party lacks an agenda.

The precariousness of this management approach, however, became apparent when Senate Democrats humiliated Lott's team in the gun-control debate. Since then, there has been renewed sniping in Republican circles about Lott's leadership fitness—specifically his lack of a defining vision for the party. The basic concern seems to be that, no matter how furiously the majority leader continues to rearrange the deck chairs, voters will eventually notice that the ship is going nowhere.

MICHELLE COTTLE

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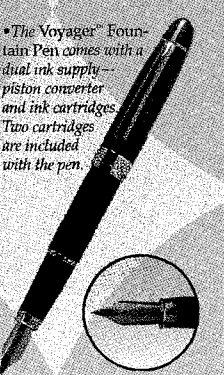

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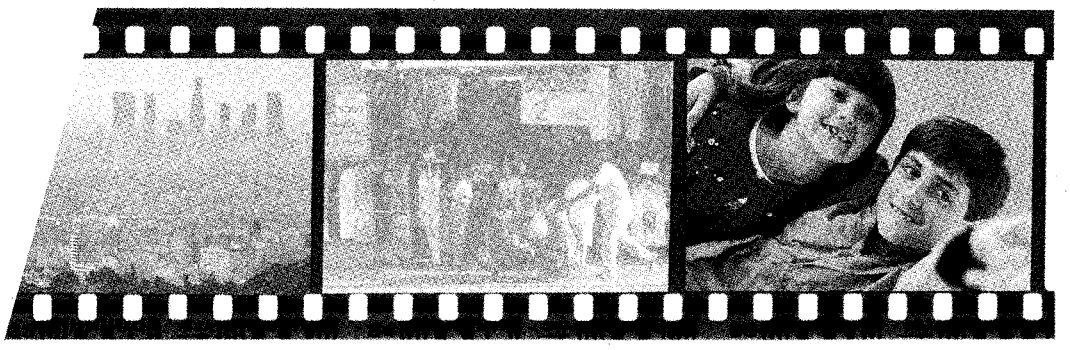

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Gaming the System

IN 1993, CONGRESS and the White House realized that spending on the big entitlement programs, Medicare and Social Security, was out of control. So they appointed a blue-ribbon commission to examine the problem. The commission did just that, the members made their feelings known, but no legislative action followed. The next year, Congress and the White House realized that spending on the big entitlement programs was still out of control. So they eventually appointed two more blue-ribbon commissions—one to study each program. The commissions did just that, the members made their feelings known, but, so far, there has been no legislative action.

Blue-ribbon commissions are an old way to make an end run around the partisanship and influence-peddling that often prevent Congress and the White House from taking badly needed legislative action. But, even as the number of commissions multiplies, the commission itself has come to embody the excesses of partisanship. Increasingly, commission members tend to have direct stakes in the subjects being deliberated, but, unlike members of Congress who might be equally biased, they are not accountable to voters.

Perhaps no case is more illustrative of this than the National Gambling Impact Study Commission, founded three years ago to look at the implications of increased gambling in America. In an article in the June 21 *Business Week*, Lorraine Woellert and Paula Dwyer document how gambling interests co-opted the commission from the outset, first expanding its mission to include the economic virtues of gambling and then gutting its authority.

Among the most effective at this game was casino mogul Steve Wynn, the chairman and CEO of Mirage Resorts Inc. In 1994, when the gaming industry first came under serious attack from politicians, Wynn, a longtime Democrat, began showing Republicans some of his money. Over the next two years, he raised more than $1 million for the GOP. In June 1996, the day after he was feted at a Mirage fund-raiser, then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich announced that he would try to strip subpoena power from the embryonic commission.

Wynn's old Democratic allies then tried to bring Wynn back into the fold. Taking time off from his busy reelection campaign, President Clinton played a round of golf with Wynn. Over the course of 18 holes, according to *Business Week*, Wynn said that he'd begin raising money for Democrats again but griped about Clinton's support for subpoena power for the commission. Soon thereafter, the White House announced that it favored only limited subpoena power. In the end, the commission was given the power to obtain documents but not to compel testimony.

Even if it had the power, it's doubtful that the commission's members would have taken advantage of it. Most of them had formed their opinions long ago. James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family and a vehement opponent of gambling, secured a spot on the commission. So did the head of the Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees International Union, which represents 75,000 casino workers. Both sides quickly became mired in the very politics they were supposed to transcend. Some commissioners began to discount studies, solicited by the commission, that they disagreed with. Indeed, one pro-gambling commission member, J. Terrence Lanni, CEO of MGM Grand Inc., is even threatening to sue the National Opinion Research Center over an anti-gambling study it did for the commission.

When the commission finally issued its 340-page report on June 18—produced at a cost of $5 million—it presented an empty document that, at its best, merely states the obvious: namely, that gambling has grown exponentially in the United States and that the government would do well to take note of this growth.

To be sure, among the commission's nonbinding recommendations are such reasonable proposals as raising the gambling age to 21, introducing a moratorium on new gambling industries, and slowing the growth of state lotteries. These lotteries are truly corrupting government services more than any private casino. Government should not necessarily be in the business of legislating morality; it definitely should not be in the business of legislating immorality. Nor should it be raising money for state services largely on the backs of poor people. Most studies have shown that a state lottery is not only a regressive tax but an inefficient one: only some 34 cents of every dollar that customers spend on lottery tickets actually make their way into a state treasury.

What is sorely needed is legislation that actually addresses such problems—not just in the case of state lotteries but in all gambling. Yet not only did Congress choose to postpone action two years ago by impaneling the gambling commission but the commission itself says that policymakers may still need "future research and assessment." Perhaps even another commission. ■

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NOTEBOOK

MAIS MERCI DIEU, THE BEER IS OK! The Belgian government fell this month when dioxin contamination forced meat, poultry, and dairy products from grocers' shelves. It seems that Belgian officials had kept silent for a month after learning that waste motor oil containing dioxin had been mixed with animal feed. Soon, Belgian food had been banned throughout Europe, while Coca-Cola was dealing with its own mini-scandal over a tummy-ache outbreak caused by careless Belgian bottlers. Might this finally inject a note of humility into the Euro-crusade to bar the United States from exporting to Europe beef raised using growth hormones, or soybeans and corn grown from genetically engineered seed? Studies have found no human health problems associated with such products, yet most of Europe keeps them out. The real issue, of course, is not food safety but trade protection for European farmers. Maybe if European farmers had to compete with their American counterparts in true free trade, they'd be a little more careful about what they fed the chickens.

SPINNING THE BOTTLE: And, while we're on the subject of skewed risk assessment, a struggle is brewing right here in America over the issue of plastic baby bottles. One study has suggested that a substance called bisphenol-A (BPA) could cause damage to the reproductive systems of male mice born from pregnant mice who were fed minute amounts of BPA in the laboratory. Now Consumers Union is urging parents to throw out their clear plastic baby bottles containing BPA, because their tests found that minuscule amounts of the stuff can leach out from bottles containing heated formula, potentially leading to "developmental" disabilities in the children. ABC's "20/20" has produced a report adding to the scare, prompting the inevitable rebuttals from the plastics industry and industry-funded scientists. We're officially agnostic on the science, but, as a matter of common sense, the BPA mini-panic strikes us as absurd—a classic example of what happens when a theoretical health risk from a purported toxin is considered with no reference to the plausible alternatives. As ABC and Consumers Union barely paused to point out, if parents don't use clear plastic bottles with BPA, they'll have to use bottles made of glass, as past generations did. That would expose babies and parents and other children around the house not to some conceivable long-range danger of contamination but to the clear and present danger of having a finger sliced off or an eye gouged by shattered glass. Guess it's only a matter of time before the next wave of television exposés on the dangers of glass bottles.

HUMAN WRONGS: At a time when the international community, in part through the efforts of the U.N.-sanctioned international war crimes tribunal, is going to great lengths to demonstrate that claims of national sovereignty are no defense against barbarism, several U.N. members are quietly going to great lengths to drape their abuses in the mantle of self-determination. The culprits are, not surprisingly, Cuba, China, and Sudan—all members of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. The three countries are using their positions on this body to snuff out debate about their practices. Specifically, as *The New York Times* reports, these countries have arranged to deny credentials to such bona fide groups as Human Rights in China. Without the credentials, the groups will be barred from U.N. premises in New York and Geneva and thus will be unable to lobby the commission or even to present their views in writing. Not satisfied with the snuffing out of free expression within their own borders, these dictatorships are now extending it to the very councils of the world body responsible for codifying human rights in the first place.

SOLID STONE: Lawrence Stone, who died on June 16 in Princeton, New Jersey, was one of the most creative members of a great generation of English historians. In the 1940s and '50s, he and his colleagues made the English Civil War of the seventeenth century, as well as the wider European crisis of which it formed a part, into a test case for rival grand theories about society, religion, and revolution. They criticized one another sharply in books and in magazines, but they created a whole new way of studying the history of English society—in Stone's case, one that emphasized the experience of entire social groups, required extensive exploration of the archives, and posed new questions (in massive books) about the history of such apparently perdurable institutions as marriage and the university. In the early '60s, Stone left Oxford for America, to the horror of many of his British colleagues. An enthusiastic American, he rapidly came to love the openness and the creativity that he saw as characteristic of our society and our universities at their best. At Princeton, he founded and directed for more than 20 years the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies, which fostered the fierce historical debate that he loved. Reared in an elitist system and so sharp-tongued that he could frighten those who didn't know him, Stone practiced democracy in ways large and small. (After he became chairman of the Princeton history department, he came in on a Saturday morning, armed with Scotch tape, and put the mailboxes of faculty members, which had been arranged by seniority since time immemorial, into alphabetical order.) In the '50s, when Stone and his friends created *Past and Present*, the most influential English historical journal of its time, they insisted that its articles be readable, and they sold copies to workers at factory gates. In later years, Stone continued to write for a wider public than the historical profession could provide. His witty, learned reviews often appeared in TNR. Like their author, they were cast on a grand scale that has become rare in the academic world, and, like him, they will be missed.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: An editor's error garbled the first sentence of last week's Cambridge Diarist. The sentence should have read: "Alan Greenspan was the speaker at Harvard Commencement exercises on June 10, exactly 30 years after the 1969 ceremonies that were so fraught with tensions of the Vietnam War and of other characteristic expressions of what was then widely seen—at least among many students and some faculty—as the depredations of capitalism." ■

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Inside Gore's pants.

Up to Speed

By Dana Milbank

CARTHAGE, Tennessee

A few weeks ago, Tipper Gore hinted to reporters that the vice president of the United States, the man who is a heartbeat from the presidency, sleeps in the nude. Now, I'm no Michael Isikoff, but I think I've got a scoop of my own concerning the vice presidential undergarments.

My troubling discovery came as I followed Al Gore on his presidential announcement tour last week. In Carthage, the normally plodding Gore raced through his speech at such breakneck speed that seven dense pages flew by in just 25 minutes. He spoke with even more haste at stops in Iowa, New Hampshire, and New York City. I checked with Laura Quinn, Gore's communications director, to see how she explained this new urgency.

"We gave him really tight underwear," she replied.

There are other possible explanations. Another aide credited performance-enhancing substances: "He's highly caffeinated." Yet another suggested the candidate was made to drink large quantities of water before his appearance, forcing him to finish quickly. It is not an altogether pleasant image to picture the superhydrated, overcaffeinated candidate hurrying cross-legged through his speech, bolting for the men's room, and peeling off his constricting skivvies.

But I'm not complaining. Whatever the cause, boxers or briefs, Gore's newfound need for speed is a blessing for listeners. I hear a good number of Gore speeches, so it's likely the faster pace will save me days of cumulative waiting time before the campaign is over. The quickspeak will also make Gore sound less condescending than he invariably does when he slowly articulates every syllable, as if he were reading a storybook to children or perhaps encountering a new word for the first time. One hopes he will never again decry "pro-TEK-shuns for GUN man-YOU-FACT-chur-urs" or vow to protect "OW-ur CHILLED-run."

Yes, there were a couple of lapses into the old ways on the announcement tour. In Iowa City, Gore, who shrewdly avoided reading a list of acknowledgments in Carthage, felt it necessary to thank a local fellow from 4-H. "I was in the 4-H club and raised beef cattle," he began, creating a momentary worry that we would hear another yarn about his youth as a farmer on the fertile plains of Massachusetts Avenue. But, once into his stump speech in Iowa, Gore delivered one line with such rat-a-tat-tat speed ("If-you-do-not-want-somebody-committed-heart-and-soul-to-bring-revolutionary-change-to-our-public-schools-then-vote-for-somebody else") that Tipper jolted her head back in mock whiplash. Gore, thankfully, has stopped playing the 45 rpm record at 33.

The big story of the Gore announcement tour has been the candidate's efforts to separate from his boss. He spoke of the "moral leadership" invested in the presidency and criticized Clinton's sexcapades. On the press plane, Gore's campaign chairman, Tony Coelho, tried to soften the vice president's remarks, telling reporters they were "fixating" on the Clinton split and saying, "We're not going to give you a headline that says this." But neither did he mind the distinction being drawn. In the same breath, Coelho spoke about a Gore who is now "unshackled." (Actually, it was Coelho himself who seemed unshackled, if not unhinged; the man was dancing on the tarmac in Cedar Rapids after Air Force Two landed, to the strains of U2 and, curiously, the Fleetwood Mac tune "Little Lies.")

Gore began to show some distance from Clinton on the eve of his announcement tour. "I'm completely different from President Clinton," he said. "I have a different set of priorities, a different approach." Gore won't put it like this, but the message is simple: I can keep the economy humming, and I won't sleep with the interns.

Some Gore strategists, who clung to Clinton earlier this year, are coming to the conclusion that the president, though still popular, is a liability. Gore aides had argued that his poor showing in polls was similar to Vice Presi-

Who are these guys?

PHOTOS MIDDLE ROW, LEFT; BOTTOM ROW, CENTER; BOTTOM ROW, RIGHT: AP

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dent Bush's fix in '88 (and that W.'s weaknesses were similar to Dukakis's), but some now say the situation is worse. One adviser was flummoxed by a CNN poll this month showing 71 percent approval of Bush's job as president, double what he got when actually in office in 1992. The adviser said such a number can only be explained by a Clinton backlash. When I asked Gore about this Bush revival, he answered, "Maybe there's a hitherto hidden fondness for deep recessions."

The getaway vehicle for Gore's departure from Clinton is faith and family, a familiar Gore theme anyway. The key passage in his announcement speech, according to campaign strategy, was this: "When we in our generation are finished adding up our deeds, our possessions, all our material and scientific advances, I believe we will ultimately be judged by whether we have strengthened or weakened the families that are the hope and soul of America." One reporter who bothered to count told me Gore used the word "family" 27 times.

The faith-and-family theme sounds a bit Republican (it doesn't excite hard-core Democratic audiences the way, say, a minimum-wage hike would), just as George W. Bush's "compassion" line (which doesn't get a rise out of Republican audiences like a tax cut does) sounds Democratic. In this post-Clinton era, both candidates are such expert co-opters that they steal from each other freely. After Gore's Iowa City speech, reporters argued about which man first used the ubiquitous "leave no one behind" line. Bush lifted Clinton's '92 campaign themes of responsibility and opportunity; Gore, meanwhile, made off with Bush's issue of federal support for religious charities.

Their similarities approach the absurd. Appearing with his father in Kennebunkport, George W. sounded like young Hamlet when he spoke of lessons learned from his father's defeat. Seventy-two hours later, in Carthage, Gore spoke similarly about his late father: "His last election was lost, but his conscience won." The eerie likeness between the two privileged scions was even evident in their summer hometowns. In Kennebunkport, signs (some with a "W." superimposed over the old George Bush versions) welcomed the new favorite son. In Carthage, storefront signs urged locals to "be a part of history" at Gore's announcement. One Gore souvenir booth promised the "LOWEST PRICE T-SHIRTS IN CARTHAGE." Even the Bass Funeral Home got in on Gore's campaign kickoff, erecting a tent on its lawn labeled, disconcertingly, "FIRST AID CENTER."

The two campaign operations, both obsessed with fundraising and endorsements, are also disturbingly alike. A couple of weeks back, I received an e-mail from the Gore camp announcing endorsements from lieutenant governors; moments later, I received a fax from Bush with his own list of lieutenant-governor endorsements. On June 3, nothing could distract the front-runners from their show-of-support competition. Three releases came over the fax machine within 66 minutes. "Forbes warns no U.S. troops should be sent into Kosovo," read a Forbes release. A Dole release had a "statement by Elizabeth Dole on Kosovo peace agreement." And the Bush fax? "Columbus Mayor Lashutka endorses Governor Bush."

IN CASE YOU live in a cave, here's the conventional wisdom from the past couple of weeks: the presidential contest, eight months before the Iowa caucuses, is a two-man race. Bush and Gore themselves, judging from their stump speeches, seem to have bypassed the primaries and gone straight to the general election. Bush campaigns against the "if it feels good, do it" culture identified with Clinton and promises "a fresh start after a season of cynicism." Gore decries the "crumbs of compassion" and the stands Bush has taken on guns and abortion.

This strategy is utterly maddening to the other candidates. Lamar Alexander, who had to lay off staff after fund-raising dried up, lashed out at Bush by saying that "most voters in Iowa couldn't pick him out of a lineup." It was an interesting theory, so I had TNR's consulting art director create just such a lineup: a piece of paper printed with the photos of three Bushes (George, George W., and Jeb), three standard-issue Republicans (Lamar, Tom DeLay, and Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge), and three men with high, patrician foreheads that resemble the Bush brow (Ohio Senator George Voinovich, New York Governor George Pataki, and Democratic Representative Marion Berry of Arkansas). I then took the lineup with me to Iowa and New Hampshire. Though half the people I asked could pick out both George W. and Lamar without much trouble, my lineup did indeed baffle a number of citizens. "George W. Bush? Sure. It's him," said one fellow, pointing without hesitation to Ridge. "That's him," said a woman, pointing confidently to the elder Bush. Another fellow fingered President Bush and, when I reminded him I was looking for W., confessed: "I don't know the difference." Another man studied the photos intently and pointed to Jeb.

But Lamar shouldn't celebrate the outcome. A similar number of Iowans and New Hampshirites couldn't identify him, either, even though he has been living among them for the past five years. When I asked my subjects to find Lamar, one fellow studied the photos at length and ultimately settled on Berry. Another man pointed to Ridge. Still another seemed to think the photo of George W. Bush *was* Lamar.

PERHAPS THE MOST compelling evidence that the primaries are over and the general election has begun comes from the debut of the hecklers. The presence of the heckler is a vote of confidence in the candidate's stature, a calculation that the heckler can get maximum exposure from the disruption. In New Hampshire, Bush heard from a heckler shouting about the anti-flag-burning amendment Bush supports. That ultimate heckler, Pat Buchanan, is talked about as a possible Reform Party candidate, so he could heckle Bush all the way to Election Day. Bush is even being heckled on the Internet: a clever website parody, GWBush.com ("Bush turns himself in for past drug crimes in an attempt to 'usher in the responsibility era' "), apparently got under the candidate's skin so much that he declared at a press conference that "there ought to be limits to freedom."

But Gore has been the most heckled of late, as his announcement tour indicated. Shortly into the Carthage speech, demonstrators seeking cheaper AIDS drugs began to

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blow whistles and disrupt the speech—until one fellow in the crowd punched a whistle-blower in the jaw, apparently knocking him to the ground. The next morning in New Hampshire, a militant AIDS group, ACT UP, was at it again about AIDS drugs, this time managing to get four or five protesters in the front row, where they unfurled their banners and blew whistles until police removed them.

And so it was obvious what awaited us at Gore's next appearance, a Manhattan rally. Much of the audience, it seemed, had come to put on a carnival of civil disobedience. There were the whistling AIDS protesters, to be sure, but there was also a man dressed up as a sunflower, apparently to make some point about gardening policy. Another man appeared to be in costume as a pickle, or perhaps a cucumber. "A pea," the *Los Angeles Times*' Ron Brownstein corrected me. A fellow with a beard spent the whole time ranting about how "Al Gore is a phony environmentalist." Another man shouted about animal tests, and somebody else protested NAFTA. A large banner proclaimed: "AL GORE: AMERICAN PSYCHO!"

It began to drizzle as Gore spoke, and it seemed that most of the crowd couldn't hear what he was saying. To me, the whole event seemed like an unmitigated disaster, the protests a crushing blow. And yet the Gore aides didn't seem displeased. Then it occurred to me: the rally had nothing to do with me or the thousands of others here. It was about getting a good television shot of Gore, with his family on the flag-bedecked stage, and a spirited crowd. The sound would come directly from his microphone. And millions of Americans that night would see and hear almost nothing of the AIDS activists, the vegetable man, or the human sunflower. In the 2000 campaign, we're all just props. ■

There is a difference in this election.

True Colors

By JONATHAN COHN

EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK nowadays, the experts are writing off Campaign 2000—not because they think the result is preordained, but because they think the result is meaningless. George W. Bush's "compassionate conservatism" is so moderate and tempered, the thinking goes, that it is functionally equivalent to Al Gore's "practical idealism"—or even the more lofty idealism Bill Bradley has been espousing. To the extent that there are some minor differences between the candidates over tax policy and such, the pundits agree, they're small beer—particularly given the reality of balanced budget rules that constrain federal spending and a prosperous economy that everybody seems to agree is best left to run itself.

There's certainly some truth to this view. After all, in Bush we have a Republican—from Texas!—who refuses to hold judges to an abortion litmus test, who spends money on public education, and whose chief economics adviser says he believes in taxing capital.

But it's possible to be well to the left of GOP zealots such as Tom DeLay and still be well to the right of Clintonized Democrats. Indeed, even a cursory look through the governor's record in Texas turns up all sorts of issues for which Bush, confronted with a pressing social problem, relied on market-based rather than state-based solutions, skimped on government spending in order to leave money for bigger tax cuts, or simply chose not to take the initiative at all—in other words, cases in which he acted just as you'd expect an authentic Republican to act.

ONE PARTICULARLY TELLING episode was a legislative battle over implementation of a 1997 federal law called the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP). Under the terms of S-CHIP, the federal government offers to subsidize health insurance for children whose families make too little money to afford it yet make too much to qualify for Medicaid. Details of how to administer the program are left to the states, which are responsible for a portion of the funding (26 percent in Texas's case), on the theory that less federal control allows states to tailor the program to the particular needs of their different populations.

S-CHIP addresses a very real problem. For the past few years, the number of children without health insurance has risen steadily. As of 1996, 15 percent of children—more than eleven million kids—lacked coverage, according to the Congressional Budget Office. About half of the uninsured children belong to parents who hold low-paying jobs that lack benefits—in other words, just the kind of hard-working, responsible souls that both pragmatic liberals and compassionate conservatives can feel good about supporting. That's one big reason the measure has won bipartisan support—its Senate boosters included Democrat Ted Kennedy and Republican Orrin Hatch—despite a total price tag of $40 billion over ten years. Although some states have been slow to take advantage of S-CHIP, Republican governors in Connecticut, Michigan, New Jersey, and New York have been among those implementing it aggressively.

So you'd think George W. Bush, who spoke so movingly of "prosperity with a purpose" in his campaign announcement speech, would have been on that list, too. Texas, after all, needs this kind of program: when it comes to children without health insurance, it's the second state in the nation both in raw numbers (only California has more total) and in percentage of the population (Arizona is first). Moreover, Texas is flush with resources to spend on S-CHIP: just as the program went into effect, Texas had a $2 billion budget surplus to play with, not to mention $1.8 billion from the settlement of the tobacco class-action case.

But, when S-CHIP became law in 1997, Bush didn't rush to draw up a plan for implementation—the prerequisite for receiving federal support. Rather, he held off submitting a plan to Washington until the Texas legislature could devise one of its own. When the legislature, which meets every

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other year, did reconvene, Bush proclaimed that "Texas must be a place with healthy children"—and then proceeded to lowball the program with his opening bid. With S-CHIP, a state could choose to expand health coverage eligibility for children in families earning as much as 200 percent of the federally established poverty line (or even more, in some circumstances). But Bush asked for funding for families only to 150 percent of that modest income level—a level well below what states such as Michigan and New Jersey were setting, and one that would have left between 175,000 and 250,000 uninsured children ineligible for coverage. Although plenty of money was available, Bush, whose chief legislative priorities at the time included a $2.7 billion tax cut, said he was concerned about whether such broad implementation was fiscally responsible—and had his staff lobby to contain the program's expanse, according to lawmakers involved with the negotiations.

In the end, Bush lost. The legislature voted to provide coverage to children in families living at up to 200 percent of the poverty line, financing the $180 million program with the tobacco settlement money. Bush, presented with a fait accompli, made the best of it. At a signing ceremony, he hailed the bill's supporters for "doing what's right for Texas"—even though it seemed to have passed more in spite of him than because of him. Indeed, Glen Maxey, a Democratic representative from Austin who championed the more aggressive measure, recalls that, after the final vote, Bush approached him on the State House floor and said something to the effect of "I want to congratulate you on your victory on the Child Health Insurance Program. You crammed it down our throats." (A spokesman for the governor says that, while Bush indeed congratulated Maxey, the rest of the quote is "not accurate.")

BECAUSE THE GOVERNOR kept a relatively low public profile during the S-CHIP episode, it's hard to know with certainty why Bush was so hesitant to implement the program. One possibility is that Bush was, as he said, simply concerned about cost—and, specifically, whether the federal money would dry up sooner than expected. It's also possible that Bush was trying to appease right-wingers in the Texas state legislature or that he shared their concern that S-CHIP amounted to creeping Hillarycare. This was the same essential argument made by hard-line conservative organizations such as the American Conservative Union when S-CHIP was before Congress. (In a letter to Congress, ACU Chairman David Keene had deplored S-CHIP because "it injects the Federal Government further into the health care system" and urged an alternative course of tax cuts, less regulation, and medical savings accounts.)

A less flattering theory—put forth, naturally, by Bush's chief critics in Austin—is that Bush's stance on S-CHIP had more to do with sheer stinginess and presidential posturing. Bush might have feared that aggressively advertising S-CHIP, as the federal law required, would have incidentally made more low-income people aware that they were eligible for Medicaid. This in turn might have further depleted state funds (Medicaid costs more per patient than S-CHIP, plus it's an entitlement) and, more important, deprived Bush of a potential campaign boast: namely, that he managed to reduce the Medicaid rolls every year as governor. (During his 1994 campaign against former Texas Governor Ann Richards, he had frequently cited the growing Medicaid rolls as evidence of her inability to crack down on welfare.) Sure enough, during the final negotiations, Bush lobbied hard against having a single, common form for S-CHIP and Medicaid applications.

What these theories have in common is that they are all consistent with a general aversion to government activism on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged. That's a defensible position, to be sure, but it's hardly the one the Democratic presidential contenders have followed over the years. Gore, for example, was a strong advocate of S-CHIP within the administration. As a senator, Bradley was a vocal advocate of government-run health care programs for the poor. He's also vowed to make universal health care coverage a presidential campaign theme.

The fight over children's health insurance in Texas, then, offers a key insight into what a Bush presidency would really be like. Come 2001, the president of the United States might face a situation quite similar to the one the governor of Texas faced in 1998: a government with a big budget surplus but confronted with pressing social problems. If the S-CHIP episode is at all indicative, Bush is apt to act as most Republicans would in that situation—that is, he'd put his energies into giving the surplus back to the people as tax breaks rather than strengthening the social safety net and using government to solve problems like the growing ranks of the uninsured. That may or may not be the compassionate thing to do. It is, however, definitely the conservative thing to do. Maybe it does matter who wins this election after all. ■

The privacy threat that didn't go away.

Brave New World

By MAGGIE SCARF

LAST JULY, WHEN the public suddenly became aware of a controversial provision of the 1996 Kennedy-Kassebaum health care law, the reaction was swift and indignant. Buried deep within the otherwise innocuous bill, the proposal called for the creation of a permanent electronic health record—or "unique health identifier," as it would be known—for every American. Each person's record would have a complete medical history, and all of the records would be stored together in a central electronic vault with access controlled by the government. According to its proponents, this wonderfully effi-

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cient method of medical record-keeping would not only help doctors make better decisions—it would open vast new possibilities for research and cost-cutting.

The plan was quickly denounced by those who worried that we might be racing headlong into an Orwellian nightmare. Fine, the government would control access to the files. But according to what criteria? Within days, Vice President Gore announced a moratorium on the development of the unique health identifier until such time as strong patient-privacy legislation was securely in place. Then Congress, not to be outdone, put real teeth in the recommendation by cutting off all resources for the implementation of the unique health identifier until the close of the fiscal year.

The uproar ended there, but the story didn't. Indeed, under the original terms of the Kennedy-Kassebaum law, if Congress doesn't pass a patient-privacy protection bill by August 21, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala must draw up a list of regulations on her own, potentially clearing the way for a return of the identifier. And, although nobody is quite sure what patient protections Shalala has in mind, a look back at a tentative, 90-page proposal she submitted to Congress in September 1997 provides a less than comforting impression.

Although Shalala asserted that there exists an "age-old right to privacy" and called for some important protections, she also argued in favor of allowing law enforcement officials or, under certain circumstances, "official[s] of the U.S. Intelligence Community" easier access to individual records. In addition, she provided a long list of others who could gain access to health records—from next of kin to researchers to insurance company clerks—whenever they cited "health care and payment purposes." In other words, Shalala's guidelines would allow for all sorts of access to these confidential records by all sorts of people—and, unless Congress or the administration intervenes, those guidelines will likely shape the final privacy regulations. "We are really at a crossroads," says Richard K. Harding, M.D., a child psychiatrist and privacy advocate who serves on the citizen's committee advising Shalala. "Centuries of medical practice, founded upon such strong ethical principles as patient-physician confidentiality and informed patient consent, are in the process of being tossed out the window, but no one seems to realize it or even be paying any attention."

THERE ARE SEVERAL rationales for allowing such wide access to personal information. One argument is that rapid transmission of information would enable health care providers to look quickly at a patient's complete medical history in an emergency and discover, say, a past disease or medical allergy that might help identify an otherwise ambiguous affliction. In addition, it would enable better—and faster—research of health care in the aggregate. "We could look at cost-effectiveness carefully—analyze who has access to the various health services and what kind of services they are," says Georgetown University law professor Larry Gostin, an expert in the field of public health and a proponent of the unique health identifier. "We could also look at hospitals in terms of how well they are functioning, and we could assess the efficacy of various kinds of medical procedures. There would be many clinical benefits, both for patients and for research." Proponents of the unique health identifier also assert that it will help prevent fraud and abuse, since the government would have an easier time tracking claims records, just as it would produce efficiency gains for insurance companies—electronic billing is less costly than paper billing. (Not surprisingly, some of the identifier's loudest advocates on Shalala's advisory board represent the insurance, data collection, software, and research industries.)

These are all worthy goals—but they'd be purchased at a steep price. Consider, for example, the identifier's repercussions for psychiatry. Who, after all, would confide his or her deepest fears, embarrassments, fantasies, and dilemmas to a clinician knowing that these most intimate secrets would be shipped off electronically to Washington, where any of a variety of people could access them for any of a variety of purposes? There are also aspects of physical treatment that a patient might understandably prefer to keep confidential—such as being tested for a sexually transmitted disease, having an abortion or a mastectomy, or suffering from a terminal illness. Medical technology is discovering all sorts of ways to identify who's at risk for genetically transmitted diseases. In the wrong hands, though, that information could cost somebody his or her insurance coverage—or even a job.

OF COURSE, MEDICAL privacy has been under attack for a while, thanks to the increasing computerization of patient records and the growth of managed care, which relies on detailed information to make decisions about treatment and coverage. Once a patient has signed a standard insurance release in order to get benefits, his health records become available to electronic file clerks, case managers, and insurance administrators, not to mention the physicians and nursing staff working in that patient's HMO or employer-owned insurance plan. Frequently, employers are also privy to medical histories: according to a 1996 University of Illinois survey, more than one-third of the Fortune 500 corporations that responded admitted to having used their employees' medical files in the course of making job-related decisions, such as promotions. (Moreover, it's possible that many respondents had done so but didn't admit it, making the true number even higher.)

This is why many psychotherapy patients, alerted to the current privacy threat, already elect to go outside their health plans and pay for treatment out of their own pockets. These individuals don't want the things they say in therapy to be used against them in the future; often, they don't even want it known that they've sought psychological treatment at all. But, if a unique health identifier is put into play, there won't even be a secure place "outside the system." As Robert Pyles, president of the American Psychoanalytic Association, puts it, a national identifier would function as a kind of "national tattoo." He explains: "Many people have the comfortable notion that if you're not a celebrity—someone like Bill Clinton, whose intimate life became a national spectacle—your personal information won't ever get you into much trouble. But it's the ordinary citizens who need to realize that

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there are very serious ways in which access to their medical information can impact upon their lives and their careers."

If, for example, someone with a health problem applies for a job—and if his potential employer can see his medical records—he may not stand a chance against a healthy applicant, who'd be less likely to drive up the firm's insurance premiums. Or, if a person with a very substantial salary is applying for a home loan and someone has figured out how to access her medical history, she may be refused that mortgage because she has suffered from depression or gone through a bout of cancer. Such fears may sound outlandish, but anecdotes of compromised privacy are not hard to find even now, without the unique health identifier. In one incident described in the November 23, 1995, *New England Journal of Medicine*, a Maryland banker who was sitting on a state health commission used data about his bank's debtors to figure out which ones were suffering from cancer—and then called in their outstanding loans.

An even more infamous episode, reported on the front page of the October 8, 1992, *New York Post*, occurred when the medical records of congressional candidate Nydia Velazquez were faxed anonymously to a number of media outlets three weeks after she had won the Democratic primary in her district in 1992. The records showed that Velazquez had, one year earlier, voluntarily admitted herself to a Manhattan hospital after a serious suicide attempt. As the congresswoman (she went on to win the election and now represents New York's twelfth congressional district) later testified in a Senate hearing on high-tech privacy issues: "For the press, it was a big story. For me, it was a humiliating experience over which I had no control.... Very few people knew about my situation, and I [had] made the decision of not sharing it with my family.... My father and mother, eighty years old, they did not understand. They still do not understand."

Velazquez is simply one of the more high-profile victims of what Brandeis University medical ethicist Beverly Woodward has termed "record browsing." As Woodward has noted, "Documented cases of browsing by insiders in large computer networks indicate that the behavior is not uncommon ... and that it may be carried out for such diverse reasons as curiosity (e.g., about friends, neighbors, relatives, or celebrities), perversity (e.g., sexual interests), anger (e.g., on the part of an employee who is about to be or has recently been dismissed), or a desire for financial or political gain." With fully computerized records stored in a central bank, the opportunities for such abuse would almost certainly multiply—and so would the actual incidence, particularly without sufficiently strict privacy protection.

Surely the most compelling argument for the use of identifiers is the potential gain for research. If it would really save thousands of lives down the road, surrendering a bit of privacy doesn't seem like such a sacrifice. But the true irony here is that the reams of information a unique health identifier would generate might not even be all that reliable in the long run. That's because, as privacy advocate Paul Appelbaum, M.D., says, "if we were to implement unique identifiers, you'd soon find everyone engaged in subverting the system in every way they could." For example, doctors uncomfortable in their role as government informers might conspire with patients by reporting as little accurate medical information as possible, and patients, once they'd wised up to the privacy threat, might withhold important data from physicians.

The real problem with the research argument, though, is that it stands in direct opposition to the most fundamental principle of research involving human subjects: informed consent. If all of our health information becomes part of a vast national database—freely available for medical studies and for business-related cost-cutting analyses—none of us would have a shred of choice when it came to our willingness to participate, or our wish not to participate, in such research. We would all, in effect, become "human subjects."

Alas, such lofty abstract arguments are not likely to persuade the other groups lobbying for the creation of identifiers—large computer, data bank, and telecommunications corporations. These wealthy, powerful companies see vast profit potential in the collection, organization, and sale of health care data. According to a May 10 article in the *Los Angeles Times*, drug companies and hospitals already spend up to $15 billion a year on technology to acquire and exchange medical information about us, such as our blood pressure and the psychiatric medications we may be using.

Huge profits can be realized by easing legal access to our health data; and, as Charles Welch, M.D., the chairman of the task force that developed the Massachusetts Medical Society's patient-privacy and confidentiality policy, recently said, "There is a long gravy train forming around our medical records." Eager investors, including database companies, insurers, and the managed care industry, stand to reap millions—while the rest of us stand to lose not only our insurance, our jobs, and our money, but our privacy and our personal dignity as well. ■

Kosovo Dispatch

Crime Scene

By Mark Dennis

As NATO's troops took over Kosovo last week, I took out my copy of the international war crimes tribunal's indictment of Slobodan Milosevic and four of his aides. This grisly document, issued May 24, I reasoned, would serve to orient my reporting—a kind of Baedeker guide to a shattered landscape that, according to NATO estimates, may contain 10,000 corpses in more than 100 mass graves.

My first stop was Velika Krusa, near the Albanian border on the main road north from Prizren to Djakovica. It was a potential transit point for KLA rebels coming from Albania, and it appears the Serb forces moved to depopulate the area

Mark Dennis has been covering Kosovo for *Newsweek* since July 1998.

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immediately after the first NATO bombs dropped. According to the indictment, 105 men and boys were shot and then burned in a house there on or around March 26. Some colleagues and I tried driving west from the main road to that house. A German Leopard tank blocked the way as the peacekeepers, who had just found burned bodies inside, waited for investigators.

Presently, a man drove up on a small tractor. He introduced himself as Naser Mazreku and explained that he had just emerged from nearly three months in hiding and was searching for his many missing relatives. A look of dread spread across his face when he realized what was going on in the house. We offered him our list of the victims described in the indictment. The farmer's brown eyes narrowed as he quickly scanned the more than 100 names under Velika Krusa. He stopped at one, and his lip started to quiver: his brother-in-law. "Serb policemen took him from my house on March 25, and we never saw him again," he said. Then he leaned over and began to cry softly.

A SHORT WAY away lies Bela Crkva, a village of 800 located east of the main road. Like Velika Krusa, it's a farming settlement surrounded by wheat fields. A villager who had just returned from hiding in a nearby town led us across a field to a row of trees a kilometer away. He stopped by a stream, its banks choked with weeds, which flowed under a railway bridge. At its edge lay a 16-meter patch of upturned earth: the mass grave. Plastic sheeting from the U.N. refugee agency lay all around. Villagers had used it to pull the bodies from the stream. The grave was shallow, and the smell of decomposing bodies filled the air. According to the indictment, 65 Kosovars were shot here.

A man in his late fifties stood nearby. His name, he said, was Zenel Popaj. He had survived the massacre and could walk us through what happened. On March 25, the Serbs had shelled Bela Crkva and moved into the village from the east. Those who could fled through the fields toward the stream. Many of them, including Popaj, hid under the railway bridge. Early the next morning, a group of twelve, including ten women and children, approached the bridge along the streambed. A Serb patrol spotted them and opened fire. The Serbs then ordered the nearly 100 villagers out from under the bridge. According to Popaj, the Serbs were wearing blue special-police uniforms. Some, he said, spoke what he presumed to be either Russian or Romanian. They separated the men from the women and children, who were ordered to leave immediately for Albania. The men, about 50 in all, were then told to strip to the waist and hand over their valuables. The town doctor attempted to intervene; a policeman shot and killed him. That's when Popaj knew they were all slated to die.

One policeman opened fire with a heavy caliber machine gun. Popaj was lucky: he stood closest to the stream and jumped in as dead or dying men piled on top of him, including his 80-year-old father. After waiting 20 minutes for the Serbs to leave, he went upstream to check on the women and children who had been shot earlier. Only a three-year-old was still alive.

Another ten kilometers north of Bela Crkva lies the town of Djakovica, whose center was leveled when the NATO bombing commenced. Two of the listed massacres occurred here, and more are certain to be unearthed: residents say up to 500 people are newly buried in the town's cemetery. A few people were riding bicycles down the street (the Serbs stole most of the villagers' cars) when we arrived. One of them pointed us to the site of perhaps the most horrific massacre in the town: 167 Milos Gilic Street. Like most of the houses and shops on Milos Gilic, 167 was soot-stained and roofless (163 and 161, owned by Serbs, stood intact).

Standing outside, Enver Nuci, a 53-year-old economist, told us his mother and sister were among the victims. The killing, he said, started on April 3 and was led by Serbs who lived on the same street. They roamed from house to house, murdering and burning as they went. Seeking refuge, the women and children from several nearby houses huddled in the basement of a billiard hall on the corner. "The men gathered the women and children in one large group before we ran away," said Nuci. "We assumed the Serbs wouldn't dare hurt them. We were wrong." The Serbs found the group and ordered them into 167. The children were bundled into one room, the women into another. Then the Serbs gunned down the women and, according to Nuci, burned the children alive. The oldest victim was 80; the youngest was two. Other Albanians in the village were then forced to come and remove the corpses, which, Nuci says, are buried in one mass grave in the town cemetery. We showed Nuci the list of names in the indictment. He found his sister's, then his mother's. "They got her age wrong," he whispered, tears welling in his eyes. "She was seventy-seven, not seventy."

IF THE WESTERN plains contained the most accessible massacres, Kosovo's central spine of hills, Drenica, likely suffered the worst bloodletting. This is the area that spawned the KLA's rebellion eight years ago and produced most of its leaders. Hardly a village or building was spared when the Serbs rolled through. Witnesses say that, in the first couple of weeks, any man who was caught faced almost certain death. Probably the most notorious massacre so far happened in the town of Izbica in northern Drenica. Before the war ended, a local doctor smuggled out a videotape showing scores of executed men, which corroborated NATO satellite images of fresh graves. The Hague says 130 men were killed there. We arrived in the remote village in mid-afternoon, just as thunderclouds were rumbling in from the south.

The mass grave, which lay on a hillside next to the village, looked just as it did in NATO photos. But the bodies were no longer there, and the ground was littered with plastic surgical gloves. Arben Hadiqi, a local KLA commander, told us that Serb forces came into the town on June 2 and 3. With the help of Gypsy workers, they dug up all 130 men who had been buried there on May 31 and moved the bodies to an unknown location. Hadiqi told us he knew of a survivor, Milazim Thaci, a cousin of the KLA leader Hashim Thaci. One of his soldiers took us to the neighboring village of Broja to find him.

Sitting under a walnut tree in his garden, Milazim Thaci told us his story. Immediately after the NATO bombing

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started, the Yugoslav army and Serb police launched a four-pronged offensive into the region. Most of the men in neighboring villages fled into the mountains. The rest, including Milazim Thaci, along with women and children, sought refuge in Izbica, which swelled from 860 to almost 3,500 people by March 28. That's when the Serbs moved in. Everyone gathered in a field, thinking the Serbs wouldn't harm them if they were all together. The Serbs demanded money and valuables from the terrified civilians and then separated the 130 remaining men from the women and children, who were ordered to head down the road to Albania. The Serbs then divided the men into two groups and marched one up a hillside to a wooded tree line. The other group remained near the original field.

Thaci was in the first group. He said that a policeman dressed in black, apparently the commander, yelled at the troops, "You know your orders." Thaci's group was forced to kneel with their backs to the Serbs. One policeman then opened fire. Thaci, just grazed by the bullets, played dead until nightfall and then ran to another village.

Hadiqi, the KLA commander, told us that, with the village so overrun with Serb troops and armor, he and the handful of guerrillas with him had no choice but to fall back to a hiding place in the woods about a kilometer away from the field. From that vantage point, he watched helplessly as the men forced to remain there were also massacred. He said about 20 policemen shot the victims. When one policeman refused to take part, said Hadiqi, his comrades eventually disarmed him and hauled him away. Another policeman, who had just finished killing his allotment of Kosovars, turned around and gunned down the rest.

As we drove back down the road, a numbing reality started to set in: the massacre sites were only the beginning. Bodies lay everywhere in Kosovo—down wells, under bushes, in unmarked plots. Only minutes from Thaci's walnut tree we came across four men digging in a small roadside cemetery. They had just returned from hiding in the mountains that morning and had heard about fresh graves in the cemetery. "We want to find our loved ones, so we don't feel it's a sin to dig up the dead," said Osman Osmani, as thunder crackled overhead. Another of the men, Shkelzen Osmani, had just found his two dead brothers. He said they were taken away, alive, by the Yugoslav army at the beginning of the war.

We watched them gently sift through the dirt of the third grave. A KLA soldier who had stopped to help pulled back a cloth to reveal a skull. The others recognized the clothing: it was an elderly man named Rexhep Mulaka. Another grave held a woman whose dress wasn't familiar. In the fifth grave, they recognized the jacket of Feriz Thaci, another cousin of the KLA leader. Then they crossed the street to start digging in another pile of upturned dirt. The smell of decomposing corpses overwhelmed us. The men expected to find at least ten bodies in the hole. As we were leaving and the rain started pouring down, one uncovered a rib cage. The tribunal wants to identify each specific massacre site. But what if the whole province has been turned into a mass grave? ■

How to stop genocide.

Saving Lives With Force

By Michael O'Hanlon

Was the NATO air campaign against Serbia just a onetime thing, or can the United States and other like-minded countries really stop genocidal wars around the world? Although this war is ending, we might face the question again soon. In recent years, the world has witnessed the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the 1992–1995 Bosnian civil war, and the 1992–1993 war-induced famine in Somalia. Even today, wars that have taken many more lives than the conflict over Kosovo remain unresolved in places such as Angola and Sudan.

We certainly cannot settle every conflict in the world. But the international community can generally do something about the worst wars—if not in every case, then at least in most. The question is how to decide when and where to intervene. Under the 1948 U.N. convention against genocide, the United States is, in theory, obligated to take major steps—up to and including the use of force—to stop genocide. In practice, however, the convention is not such a clear guide. It defines genocide as an effort to destroy, "in whole or in part," a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. But does that mean that a dozen ethnically motivated murders qualify? Presumably not; otherwise, there would be genocides going on all over the world all the time.

Yes, some cases are clear, such as the 1994 genocide by Hutus against Tutsis in Rwanda. But was Serbia's war against the Kosovar Albanians genocide? In 1998 and early 1999, about 2,000 Kosovar Albanians were killed by Slobodan Milosevic's forces—a very modest number of combat-related deaths in comparison with many other wars around the world. However, Serbia's ethnic cleansing operations eventually drove hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanians from their homes, exposing them to deadly hunger and disease, and NATO now estimates that Serbian forces killed at least 10,000 mostly unarmed civilian Kosovar Albanians once the air strikes began.

Partly because of these ambiguities, former Representative Stephen Solarz and I have proposed that military intervention should be considered whenever the rate of killing in a country or region greatly exceeds the U.S. murder rate, whether the killing is genocidal in nature or not. Our moral premises are twofold: first, since all human lives have equal value, the United States and other countries should use their military and political resources where they can save the greatest number of individuals. Second, the United States

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cannot be politically or morally expected to try to make other countries safer than its own domestic society.

The annual U.S. murder rate is roughly 1,000 people per every 10 million. According to our proposal, the United States and other countries should strongly consider intervention where the intensity of killing or war-related starvation is several times greater—say five to ten times that number. To be sure, precise data about death rates in wars is rarely available. Nor should the world wait a whole year to determine an annual rate. And there will sometimes be cases where fewer deaths justify humanitarian intervention. For example, in Haiti in 1994 and in Kosovo this year, the fact that countries suffering civil violence were near to the United States and Western Europe provided an added rationale for action.

Generally, though, the criteria for intervention that Solarz and I have devised narrow the list of candidates for intervention. While wars in Algeria, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Congo, the Ethiopian-Eritrean border area, and a few other places have been severe, they haven't been nearly as lethal as others. As Solarz and I have argued, there were about eight extremely lethal conflicts between 1992 and 1997 that met our criteria: Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, and Angola, as well as Bosnia and Chechnya. Since we first wrote on the topic in the Autumn 1997 *Washington Quarterly*, North Korea (where the famine stems from the government's tyranny and corruption and is therefore akin to a war) and Kosovo might have joined the list, making for a total of ten during the Clinton presidency. All told, these ten cases have accounted for more than 75 percent of all war-related deaths in the world since 1992.

Once we have reasonable criteria for determining which conflicts are so lethal that they may warrant intervention, the next question is: How do we actually intervene? First and foremost, since saving lives is an inherently political mission that will often be opposed by at least one local party to a conflict, intervening forces need to be braced to take sides; well-intentioned proposals for "separating combatants" and "disarming militias" may not work smoothly. Taking a side means that any intervention will require battle-ready combat units deployed in sufficient numbers to protect indigenous populations and themselves.

In a small, militarily weak country like Rwanda, it might have sufficed to send 10,000 to 15,000 troops. But, in gigantic Angola, where fighting is spread throughout much of the country, or in Kosovo, where the enemy has many tens of thousands of troops under arms and a good deal of heavy military equipment, an intervening force could easily require tens of thousands of troops.

With interventions of this magnitude, the difficulty then becomes getting troops into place quickly enough to stop the killing. In discussions about a possible ground war in Kosovo—and the logistical complications of deploying 100,000 or more fairly heavily armed forces to a remote part of the world with challenging terrain and underdeveloped infrastructure—some people suggested that any NATO ground invasion would have taken three or more months to prepare. While I believe that half that time would have sufficed—an intervention that emphasized Army air assault and Marine Corps forces could have been under way in a little more than a month—Kosovo is probably one of the most difficult interventions we would face. Yes, in most instances we'd likely encounter physical conditions just as challenging as those we would have faced in the Balkans, but the presumed enemy would not be as strong as Serbia.

In such situations, airborne and other light infantry forces, backed up by modest amounts of heavy weaponry, would generally be able to get the job done. And those units could be transported fast—10,000 to 20,000 troops can be moved virtually anywhere in the world within a couple of weeks, even to inland locations like Rwanda. The American C-17 transport aircraft can use most short runways; it and other large planes can also fly to a regional staging base and then transfer equipment to smaller C-130 aircraft and helicopters for a final approach.

And what about air power? Alas, NATO's partial success in Kosovo hardly proves that air power alone can stop civil wars. Most involve few heavy weapons that can be spotted and attacked from long range. And, in less developed countries, there are few large strategic economic targets; bombing them as we bombed Serbia's infrastructure may exacerbate a humanitarian crisis without gaining great leverage over the factions that generally wage such wars.

The truth is that we cannot usually expect humanitarian interventions to be as casualty-free (for our forces) as the recent war against Serbia. Ground-combat missions are inherently dangerous. Dozens of Americans were killed in action in such relatively minor operations as Grenada, Panama, and Somalia. A lucky shot by a man-portable surface-to-air missile or even a rocket-propelled grenade could bring down an airplane or helicopter; that's how the Mogadishu debacle began for U.S. forces in 1993. Even poorly armed militias can successfully ambush Western forces in urban or forest settings.

If we do intervene, we will generally have three kinds of options: (1) take sides, either overthrowing a reigning regime or helping one side in a civil war defeat the other; (2) impose and then enforce a partition line between two main geographic zones (not simply between different militias within a given city or region); or (3) set up safe havens or humanitarian relief zones to protect a threatened population from murder and starvation.

Even if the United States and like-minded countries choose the right time and place to intervene, they could easily go about it the wrong way. For example, waffling between a limited intervention to provide food relief in Somalia and aggressively seeking to eliminate one particular militia from the country's political scene cost 18 American lives in October 1993. In Bosnia, setting up safe havens failed to make towns like Srebrenica anything close to safe. Using air power against Serbia this year has produced an ambiguous result: ethnic cleansing may be largely reversed and Milosevic's aggression ultimately defeated—but at the cost of thousands of Kosovar Albanian lives and the wholesale destruction of their homeland. The wrong intervention may well be worse,

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or little better, than no intervention at all—not just for our own country but even for those we are trying to help.

Moreover, there will be times—even in cases like the ones that meet Solarz's and my criteria for lethality—when using force to stop genocide or other mass killing won't be appropriate. For a humanitarian intervention to be wise and ethical, it must be attempted only if the odds are excellent that it will make a bad situation better and not worse. Intervening to stop Russia from killing tens of thousands of innocent Chechens, for instance, would have risked a major-power war between nuclear-weapons states with the potential to kill far more people than the intervention could have saved. Invading North Korea to bring food to its starving people would probably precipitate all-out war on the peninsula, quite possibly killing as many civilians in Seoul (to say nothing of soldiers on both sides of the war) as the food aid would save in North Korea. Entering into the Angolan civil war would force us to choose sides between our former anti-Communist associate Jonas Savimbi, a maniacal killer who has already violated two major peace accords, and the corrupt dos Santos government.

THOMAS FUCHS

In Rwanda, however, the sheer scale of the killing—nearly one million dead in several months' time in 1994—meant that almost any intervention would have been better than standing aside. The international community should have quickly sent at least 10,000 forces to defeat the genocidal Hutu militias that targeted Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Whether those forces then stayed on for years to help the country rebuild or took the radical step of partitioning Rwanda would in this urgent case have been a secondary concern.

In Sudan, we should also have intervened in the early '90s. In fact, the case for doing so may become compelling again, as the cease-fire that has been in effect there for several months shows signs of fraying. The most natural solution to end the fighting and associated famine would be to partition the country into two parts: a predominantly Muslim north and a predominantly Christian south. That would not please Western liberals who insist on promoting multiethnic democracies all over the world, but it could save hundreds of thousands of lives quickly, and at a modest blood cost to the United States.

In Liberia, the number of victims in the civil war during the first half of the '90s was much smaller than in Rwanda or Sudan. Nonetheless, the world should have intervened to stop the killing and help establish a coalition government and a professional military. Ethnic hatreds were less severe, and the violence more arbitrary and wanton, than in many other wars. Under those conditions, chances were good that the bloodshed could have been quickly stopped. Liberia's modest geographic size is an additional factor that would have lent viability to a possible intervention.

Does the United States really have to do the lion's share of the work in these types of interventions? Unfortunately, no other country is capable of doing so yet. But our European allies, and several other countries such as Canada and even Japan, should get better at deploying modest numbers of troops to distant combat zones. Granted, this improvement will take several years, even if the European Union's recent efforts to organize itself more effectively for power projection bear fruit. (Only Great Britain and, to a lesser extent, France are making any serious efforts in this direction at present.) As for the neighbors of a country where genocide or highly deadly warfare might be occurring, most would not be militarily capable of conducting operations beyond their own borders. Moreover, it's doubtful that neighboring countries—which may be predisposed to favoring a certain faction over another—are removed enough to play the role of a fair-minded outsider.

Stopping the world's worst wars is not always practical or worth the cost—sometimes our efforts will only produce a temporary peace. But we should have intervened in Rwanda, Sudan, and probably Liberia. In addition, we were right to get involved in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. At least in Somalia and Bosnia, hundreds of thousands of lives were ultimately saved—even if hundreds of thousands had already been lost by the time the interventions took place. If we had intervened properly in all six of these cases, we could have prevented about half of the world's war-related deaths since 1992 and, depending on how you apply the term, two or three genocides. Doing so would have required us to spend a couple percent more on defense than we did this decade. It might have cost dozens or even hundreds of American lives. But we could have saved literally millions of souls in the process—and given a country still searching for its place in the post-cold-war world a much clearer and nobler sense of purpose. ■

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Second Thoughts

What the right to bear arms really means.

By AKHIL REED AMAR

SO WHAT *DOES* the Second Amendment mean? A lot, says the National Rifle Association. Not much, say gun-control groups. Until recently, it didn't much matter who was right—on all but the mildest of measures, the NRA had the votes (and the cash), and that was that. Then came Littleton. Now proposals for serious federal gun controls are in the air. Thus far, the House and Senate have failed to agree on any specific gun measures, and whatever Congress ultimately decides in conference promises to be modest at best, targeting only gun shows and youngsters. But prominent politicians and civic leaders are now arguing for far more sweeping restrictions on guns, including mandatory licensing schemes and strict limits on the number of weapons that may be purchased in a single transaction. Would such measures violate the Constitution? Is the NRA right after all? No, but neither are its leading critics. Properly construed, the Second Amendment means quite a lot, but not what the NRA thinks.

Begin with the words of the amendment itself: "A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." This curious syntax has perplexed most modern readers: How do the two main clauses with different subject-nouns fit together? Do these words guarantee a right of militias, as the first clause seems to suggest, or a right of people, as the second clause seems to say? In one corner, gun controllers embrace a narrow, statist reading, insisting that the amendment merely confers a right on state governments to establish professional state militias like the National Guard or local SWAT teams. No ordinary citizen is covered by the amendment in this view. In the other corner, gun owners and their supporters read the amendment in a broad, libertarian way, arguing that it protects a right of every individual to have guns for self-protection, for hunting, and even for sport. Virtually nothing having to do with personal weaponry is outside the amendment in this view. Both readings are wrong.

The statist reading sidesteps the obvious fact that the amendment's actual command language—"shall not be infringed"—appears in its second clause, which speaks of "the people" and not "the states." A quick look at the Tenth Amendment—which draws a sharp distinction between "the states" and "the people"—makes clear that these two phrases are not identical and that the Founders knew how to say "states" when they meant states. What's more, the eighteenth-century "militia" referred to by the first clause was not remotely like today's National Guard. It encompassed virtually all voters—somewhat like today's Swiss militia—rather than a small group of paid, semiprofessional volunteers.

But the libertarian reading must contend with textual embarrassments of its own. The amendment speaks of a right of "the people" collectively rather than a right of "persons" individually. And it uses a distinctly military phrase: "bear arms." A deer hunter or target shooter carries a gun but does not, strictly speaking, bear arms. The military connotation was even more obvious in an earlier draft of the amendment, which contained additional language that "no one religiously scrupulous of bearing arms shall be compelled to render military service in person." Even in the final version, note how the military phrase "bear arms" is sandwiched between a clause that talks about the "militia" and a clause (the Third Amendment) that regulates the quartering of "soldiers" in times of "war" and "peace." Likewise, state constitutions in place in 1789 consistently used the phrase "bear arms" in military contexts and no other.

By now it should be evident that we need to understand how all the words of the amendment fit together, and how they, in turn, mesh with other words in the Constitution. The amendment's syntax seems odd only because modern readers persistently misread the words "militia" and "people," imposing twentieth-century assumptions on an eighteenth-century text. The key subject-nouns were simply different ways of saying the same thing: at the Founding, the militia was the people and the people were the militia. Indeed, the earlier draft of the amendment linked the two clauses with linchpin language speaking of "a well regulated militia, composed of the body of the people." The linchpin was later pulled out as clumsy and redundant. A modern translation of the amendment might thus be: "An armed and militarily trained citizenry being conducive to freedom, the right

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of the electorate to organize itself militarily shall not be infringed."

Call this the communitarian reading as opposed to the statist and libertarian readings that dominate modern discourse. Statists anachronistically read the "militia" to mean the government (the paid professional officialdom) rather than the people (the ordinary citizenry). Equally anachronistically, libertarians read "the people" to mean atomized private persons, each hunting in his own private Idaho, rather than the citizenry acting collectively. But, when the Constitution speaks of "the people" rather than "persons," the collective connotation is primary. "We the People" in the preamble do ordain and establish the Constitution as public citizens meeting together in conventions and acting in concert, not as private individuals pursuing our respective hobbies. The only other reference to "the people" in the Philadelphia Constitution of 1787 appears a sentence away from the preamble, and here, too, the meaning is public and political, not private and individualistic. Every two years, "the people"—that is, the voters—elect the House. To see the key distinction another way, recall that women in 1787 had the rights of "persons" (such as freedom to worship and protections of privacy in their homes) but did not directly participate in the acts of "the people"—they did not vote in constitutional conventions or for Congress, nor were they part of the militia/people at the heart of the Second Amendment.

The rest of the Bill of Rights confirms this communitarian reading. The core of the First Amendment's assembly clause, which textually abuts the Second Amendment, is the right of "the people"—in essence, voters—to "assemble" in constitutional conventions and other political conclaves. So, too, the core rights retained and reserved to "the people" in the Ninth and Tenth Amendments were rights of the people collectively to govern themselves democratically. The Fourth Amendment is trickier: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated." Here, the collective "people" wording is paired with more individualistic language of "persons." And these words obviously focus on the private domain, protecting individuals in their private homes more than in the public square. Why, then, did the Fourth use the words "the people" at all? Probably to highlight the role that jurors—acting collectively and representing the electorate—would play in deciding which searches were reasonable and how much to punish government officials who searched or seized improperly. An early draft of James Madison's amendment protecting jury rights helps make this linkage obvious and also resonates with the language of the Second Amendment: "[T]he trial by jury, as one of the best securities to the rights of the people, ought to remain inviolate." Note the obvious echoes here—"security" (Second Amendment), "secure" (Fourth Amendment), and "securities" (draft amendment); "shall not be infringed," "shall not be violated," and "ought to remain inviolate"; and, of course, "the right of the people" in all three places.

If we want an image of the people's militia at the Founding, we should think first of the militia's cousin, the jury. Like the militia, the jury was a local body countering imperial power—summoned by the government but standing outside it, representing the people, collectively. Like jury service, militia participation was both a right and a duty of qualified voters who were regularly summoned to discharge their public obligations. Like the jury, the militia was composed of amateurs arrayed against, and designed to check, permanent and professional government officials (judges and prosecutors, in the case of the jury; a standing army in the case of the militia). Like the jury, the militia embodied collective political action rather than private pursuits.

Founding history confirms this. The Framers envisioned Minutemen bearing guns, not Daniel Boone gunning bears. When we turn to state constitutions, we consistently find arms-bearing and militia clauses intertwined with rules governing standing armies, troop-quartering, martial law, and civilian supremacy. Libertarians cannot explain this clear pattern that has everything to do with the military and

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nothing to do with hunting. Conversely, statists make a hash of all these state constitutional provisions using language very similar to the Second Amendment to affirm rights *against* state governments.

Keeping the jury-militia analogy in mind, we can see the kernel of truth in these competing accounts and also what's missing from each. Statists are right to see the amendment as localist and to note that law and government help bring the militia together. So, too, with the jury. Twelve private citizens who simply get together on their own to announce the guilt of a fellow citizen are not a lawful jury but a lynch mob. Similarly, private citizens who choose to own guns today are not a well-regulated militia of the people; they are gun clubs. But what the statist reading misses is that, when the law summons the citizenry together, these citizens act as the people *outside* of government, rather than as a professional and permanent government bureaucracy. A lynch mob is not a jury, but neither is the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Likewise, the NRA and other gun clubs are not the militia, but neither is the National Guard. Libertarians rightly recoil at the authoritarianism of their opponents in the debate but wrongly privatize what is an inherently collective and political right. It is as if Ross Perot insisted that the First Amendment guaranteed him the right to conduct his own poll and, on the basis of this private poll, to proclaim himself president.

But to see all this is to see what makes the Second Amendment so slippery today: the legal and social structure on which the amendment is built no longer exists. The Founders' juries—grand, petit, and civil—are still around today, but the Founders' militia is not. America is not Switzerland. Voters no longer muster for militia practice in the town square.

Of course, we are free today to read the Second Amendment more broadly if we choose. Thoughtful legal scholars of all stripes—from Sanford Levinson on the left to Eugene Volokh on the right—have reminded us that other amendments have been read generously; why not the Second? But, given that a broad reading is a policy choice rather than a clear constitutional command, it must be functionally justified. And the mere fact that, say, the First Amendment has been read expansively is not an automatic argument for equal treatment for the Second. For example, violent felons, even while in prison and especially after their release, obviously have a First Amendment right to print their opinions in newspapers. Yet such felons have never had a Second Amendment right to own guns. Even the NRA accepts this double standard. But what underlies it? The obvious functional idea that sticks and stones and guns in the hands of dangerous felons can indeed hurt others in ways that their words cannot.

Especially today's guns. At the Founding, single-fire muskets had certain attractive and democratic properties. A person had to get close to you to kill you, and, in getting close, he typically rendered himself vulnerable to counterattack. It took time to reload, and so one person could not kill dozens in a few seconds. One person, one gun, one shot was not as perfect a system of majority rule as one person, one vote, but the side with the most men often won; and, as lawyer Brent McIntosh emphasizes in a forthcoming essay in the *Alabama Law Review*, there was a rough proportionality of capacity to kill and be killed. Virtually all male citizens were trained in the use of weapons and had them handy. What's more, madmen were constrained by the strong social network of the well-regulated militia. Today, technological and social limits have been loosened, perhaps rendering madmen more dangerous.

So, if we seek broad readings of the amendment faithful to the core values of the Founding, here are a few that the NRA hasn't proposed but that are at least as plausible as their preferred broad readings:

Take the "mil" out of the militia. In highly sophisticated scholarship transcending the typical statist-versus-libertarian debate, Indiana law professor David Williams has emphasized how the militia bound citizens together in a common venture. It played an important social function in the community and embodied a democratic culture in which rich and poor citizens from all walks of life came together as equals—as with the jury. Without some forms of democratic glue, our culture risks flying apart, especially in today's world of increasing demographic diversity and specialization of labor. Thus, a broad modern reading of the amendment would call for compulsory or quasi-compulsory national service, with both military and nonmilitary alternatives, like Volunteers in Service to America or the Civilian Conservation Corps. (Recall that an early version of the amendment provided for compulsory military service with an opt-out for conscientious objectors.) Instead of bowling alone, Americans would band together, building a more solid base of social capital and civic virtue.

Create an Army that truly looks like America. At the Founding, a standing army in peacetime was viewed with dread and seen as the Other—mercenaries, convicts, vagrants, aliens—rather than ordinary citizens. Today, we view our professional Armed Forces with pride. These forces represent Us, not Them. As lawyer-journalist Alan Hirsch has noted, the Founders' militia has begun to morph into today's Army. If so, women and gays should play as equal a role as possible in today's institutions of collective self-defense. The militia celebrated by the Second Amendment should reflect the people, just as the jury should. To put the point another way, the Second Amendment says that voters should bear arms and that arms-bearers should vote. Since the Nineteenth Amendment has made women equal voters, the Second Amendment demands that they be given equal status in arms. (Allowing women to buy guns at the local Wal-Mart might make them equal in libertarian gun-toting, but it does not make them equal in communitarian arms-bearing—it fails to include them on equal terms in modern America's militia-substitute.)

And what's true for women may also be true for gay men: the Armed Forces' discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation is, formally at least, discrimination on grounds of sex, in tension with this Nineteenth Amendment ideal. (If Leslie has sex with John, it is a form of sex discrimination to

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treat Leslie one way if she is a woman and a different way if he is a man.) Formal sex discriminations can be justified in some cases, but they should be closely interrogated. For example, separate bathrooms for men and women are, formally, a kind of sex discrimination, but this arrangement is widely seen as justified by legitimate privacy concerns. So, too, certain sex-based exclusions in military policy might be justifiable, where these exclusions reflect real physical differences relevant to modern warfare. But, where exclusions of women and gays are justified merely by the need to maintain "morale" and "unit cohesion," we should be wary: similar arguments were once used to maintain racial discrimination in our Armed Forces.

Rethink presidential power to use military force unilaterally. At the Founding, standing armies were feared as engines of executive despotism and military adventurism. If the president could simply command hired guns who would mindlessly obey, he would have less need to persuade his fellow citizens before pursuing risky policies. Thus, the Founders' reliance on a militia effectively decentralized and democratized decisions about whether and how to go to war. In a brilliant article in the May 1991 *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Harvard's Elaine Scarry argues that our modern military system has betrayed the values and vision of the Second Amendment. Today's Minuteman missiles, she suggests, are far less democratic than the Founders' Minuteman muskets.

These, then, are a few broad readings that in various ways try to stay true to the vision of the Founders' Second Amendment while also making modern sense. None of these readings is compelled, and all of them would require much more elaboration before they should be accepted.

But is there nothing to be said for the strong libertarian view? In fact, there is a great deal to be said on behalf of an individual right to keep a gun in one's home for self-defense, as even Harvard Law School's Laurence Tribe—no pawn of the NRA—has publicly acknowledged of late. But the best constitutional arguments for this view come not from the Founding but from the Reconstruction some fourscore years later.

Even with regard to the Founding, it's simplistic to deny any link between collective self-protection and individual self-defense. Lawyer and legal scholar Don Kates reminds us that, somewhat like standing armies, roving bands of thugs and pirates posed a threat to law-abiding citizens, and a trusty musket in every home was indeed part of a system of community policing against predators. (Note that the amendment encompasses the right to "keep" as well as "bear" arms.) But this was not the main image of the Second Amendment at the Founding. Rather, the amendment was about Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill. When arms were outlawed, only the king's men would have arms.

The amendments forged in the afterglow of the Revolution reflected obvious anxiety about a standing army controlled by the new imperial government and affection for the good old militia. But things looked different to Americans after a bloody Civil War. Massachusetts militiamen had once died for liberty at Bunker Hill, but more recently Mississippi militiamen had killed for slavery at Vicksburg. The imperial Redcoats at the Founding were villains, but the boys in blue who had won under Grant and Sherman were heroes—at least in the eyes of Reconstruction Republicans. And, when this generation took its turn rewriting the Constitution, it significantly recast the right to weapons. Textually, the Fourteenth Amendment proclaimed the need to protect fundamental "privileges" and "immunities" of citizens. The amendment explicitly limited state governments, but its authors made clear that no government, state or federal, had the right to violate fundamental rights of citizens. Although the Supreme Court ignored this language for almost a century, there are recent signs that suggest the justices may be willing to give this clause a second look. (See "Lost Clause," by Akhil Reed Amar, TNR, June 14.)

And, if they do, gun groups would have reason to cheer. As scholars such as Stephen Halbrook, Michael Kent Curtis, Robert Cottrol, and Ray Diamond have documented in great detail, the framers of the Fourteenth Amendment strongly believed in an individual right to own and keep guns in one's home for self-protection. Most obviously, blacks and Unionists down South could not always count on the local police to keep white night-riders at bay. When guns were outlawed, only Klansmen would have guns. Thus, the Reconstruction Congress made quite clear that a right to keep a gun at home for self-protection was indeed a constitutional right—a true "privilege" or "immunity" of citizens.

That's the good news for the NRA—with the even better news that, if the Court took this Reconstruction vision seriously, state and local governments would be limited along with federal officials. But the bad news, at least for the most ardent gun lovers, is that whatever Fourteenth Amendment right exists is a limited one. Virtually no one today is seriously arguing to take away all guns from homes. (And actually trying to do so would be a nightmare for anyone who cares about liberty and privacy, given that guns are stashed everywhere and may well outnumber people in America.) Instead, most proposals seek to regulate rather than prohibit—limiting the amount and type of ammunition, restricting the number of guns one can buy in a given week, and so on. Requiring registration of guns and even licenses with practical and book tests, on the model of licensing drivers, sends some gun lovers up the wall—the first step toward confiscation, they predict in dire tones. But this is hard to take seriously. The authors of the Second Amendment, after all, were perfectly comfortable knowing that the government would know who had guns—every voter—and also were perfectly comfortable requiring those who owned guns to be properly trained and monitored in their use. Realistic gun control today may not be exactly what the Framers had in mind when they said that the armed citizenry should be "well regulated." But—at least in a world that is so distant from the Founders—it's close enough. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Citizen Cain

THE MASSACRE AT Columbine High School in April brought a flood of agonized responses. The whole country was sickened—yet again—by teenage mayhem, which didn't end with Columbine High. Causes for these horrors are being sought, and high among the suspected causes is the abhorrent film and TV violence now gorged on by teenagers. It is certainly hard to believe that so much slavering murder on large and small screens is not affecting adolescent fantasies.

But I have been worried by the broom-sweep in some of the comment. Most particularly, I was concerned by Gregg Easterbrook's article ("Watch and Learn," May 17) in which he attacked the disgusting pharisaic greed of those who exploit the juvenile appetite for blood. I was struck by the fact that, more pointedly than some others had done, Easterbrook included *Natural Born Killers* as an example of exploitative violence. I couldn't help feeling tangentially involved, because I had praised Oliver Stone's film when it appeared ("Apocalypse Now," October 3, 1994) and had admired it even more when I saw it again later that year. I felt obliged to look at the film again in the light of the Columbine events and Easterbrook's comment. This was easy to do: a tape of *Natural Born Killers* is now available in the director's version, with the restoration of about 150 small cuts—an addition of only about six minutes—that had been made to secure an R rating.

I have now to report that my admiration for this film is undiminished, has in fact grown. *Natural Born Killers* is a paradigm, furious yet sardonic, of some of the ills and the imbalances in American life, the festerings of injured ego, that exploded at Columbine High. (For me, there were fifteen victims at Columbine, not thirteen as usually cited. Why omit the two killers who then killed themselves? In any humane conspectus of crumpled teenage lives, they were victims, too.) It seems to me important to distinguish between Stone and the cheapjacks at the lower end of his profession. I'm not arguing that Stone's work ought to be available to children under seventeen, although I don't see how younger teenagers who are barred from certain films can be shielded from the violence in newspapers and on TV—for instance, the news from Columbine itself. I'm speaking here only of the effect of this film on adults. My interest is to see that it is not classed with exploitation films merely because it has at least as many murders as the worst of them. (Fifty-two in the three weeks of the killers' career in Stone's picture, and that's before the final prison explosion.)

Let me try to illustrate the film's quality with its opening ten or twelve minutes. (In actual fact, this "director's version" opens with a brief introduction by Stone in which he points out, with samples, some of the material that had been cut.) We first see a lonely stretch of desert road, then a wolf against the sky, then a close-up of a hissing snake. Then we are in a roadside diner where Mickey and Mallory, the title pair, are having coffee. While Mickey orders pie, Mallory goes to the jukebox, puts on a record, takes off her coat and begins to dance in her bustier and slinky slacks. Three men arrive at the diner. Two of them come in while the third works on their car outside. The youngest newcomer gravitates to the gyrating Mallory, dances alongside her, and soon makes moves on her. She attacks him fiercely. A brawl swiftly erupts in which the two newcomers, plus the waitress, plus the cook, are killed by Mickey and Mallory. The man outside tries to flee, but Mickey throws a knife through an open window and fells him.

Those are the basic data of the scene, probably to be found in the original story by Quentin Tarantino, author of *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*. But they are only the scaffolding for the screenplay by Stone, David Veloz, and Richard Rutowski, which in turn couldn't have been much more than a scaffold for Stone's directing and editing. We do not know at the start of the diner sequence that Mickey and Mallory are already well launched on their calm, chuckly, savage murderings, but the atmosphere in the diner, set by lighting and camera angles, is ominous. As the sequence begins, a spate of images pours through the diner's TV, including a glimpse of Nixon saying "As I leave...." The camera, almost always canted to one side or another, keeps moving in and out on the characters, and the images keep changing, from color to black-and-white and back, and back again, suggesting that Mickey and Mallory are aware of themselves as figures in a film and keep thinking of ways to imitate movie action better. Bits from that opening desert road are intercut. Throughout the callous killing, Mickey is comically sage, like a judge dispensing justice instead of sudden death. The knife he throws after the fleeing man circles in comic slow-motion flight. Mallory is sensuously enjoying herself. When the scene is concluded—to their satisfaction—they embrace; the lighting melts into a rosy glow, and they dance slowly to *La vie en rose*.

Thus this opening diner scene fixes the texture that Stone uses in the whole picture, a texture that I once called "collage in forward motion." This unique, intricate, contrapuntal dynamics eventually incorporates comic strips and politics, nature and the unnatural, is both savagely satiric and chillingly flip, is the film's aesthetic and moral base.

Then come the opening credits, under which we get glimpses of the violence ahead. Then there is a scene under the desert stars, Mickey and Mallory outside their parked roadster. As she talks, we faintly see angels float down above her, angels whose (ironic) presence underscores her lack of guilt about the just-concluded diner blood-bath. Mickey tells her how much he loves her, and as she squats to pee, she says she has loved him ever since they met. Then, slam!, comes the title of a TV show, *I Love Mallory*, technically a flashback, in which the first meeting of Mickey and Mallory is presented as an episode of a sitcom, with a canned laugh-track. In the course of this episode, the pair decide to hook up. They barbarously murder her parents, and set off in her father's roadster—and all within the sitcom framework.

However a teenager might view these opening minutes, hardly any adult would think them scenes from a run-of-the-horror-mill flick. The mature viewer may dislike this material but can scarcely ignore that Stone is much less concerned with violence as such than with using it to thematic purpose. Very early on he makes clear that he is not only going to tell us his story, he is going to lampoon the telling of that story by the media, as the murders and other atrocities committed by this pair cram the maw of the media and titillate the lives of the fascinated public.

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Throughout, Stone seems to view what is happening as a new take on André Bazin's definition of an image: "everything that the representation on the screen adds to the object there represented." Stone's film creates a symbiosis between the screen's usual reality and the Bazinian images of it—what the TV screen adds to reality. Instances abound. The flashback to the suicide of Mickey's father, deliberately committed in front of the son when he was a small child, is handled like a documentary. When Mickey is ultimately captured, a female Japanese TV reporter describes the scene to the camera—her comments are subtitled—as if to assure the world that, since it's on TV, it's true. The *Walpurgisnacht* prison riot at the end is caused by a live TV show in the prison.

This tape of the "restored" version is packaged with a second tape, consisting of outtakes, an alternate ending, and statements by Stone and others. Among his remarks, Stone says that in a film about two people who break rules, the filmmaker had to break a few rules, too. Several people in the cast, including the two principals, report that performing in this film had little to do with conventional directing and acting. Stone tried to keep his actors sizzling, improvising, open. But even without these interviews, we could know that this film blends design with spontaneity, just as the story blends action with the media's gobbling of it.

Is any film worth the life of anyone, especially of a teenager? The question is at the level of a game of Truth or Consequences. A more useful question is whether we want to restrict the cultural fullness of film that those teenagers will see after they mature. In our eagerness to change the conditions in which teenagers are stuffed with garbage, it would be easy to maim the possibilities for serious work intended for the mature audience—possibilities that are slim enough anyway.

A moment such as this one, when Columbine and comparable events have smitten us, carries some danger of overcompensation. For me, ours would be a poorer film world if Stone had not made, among his other rightly troubling pictures, *Natural Born Killers*. He understands that the ur-murderer Cain dwells right among us, within us, is only too easily stirred, and, when loosed nowadays, becomes a glamorous star. An artist who hates Cain's stardom as a corruption, who can slash it open with the blackest possible humor, is himself not a corrupter. ■

Madeleine Albright's foreign past and America's foreign policy.

Memory Goes to War

By ROGER COHEN

Madeleine Albright: A Twentieth-Century Odyssey by Michael Dobbs

(Henry Holt, 466 pp., $27.50)

I.

DOWN FROM THE heavens he came a decade ago this month, descending by helicopter onto the Field of Blackbirds in Kosovo to deliver a speech that still reads as a paradigm of nationalist madness. About a million Serbs gathered that day to hear Slobodan Milosevic. The occasion was the six-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, lost by the Serbs to the Ottoman Turks but later transformed through prayer and song into a celestial victory that outweighed earthly humiliation, and into the emblem of the ongoing Serbian quest for a nation-state with stable borders.

Milosevic, new to power and giddy with its aura, seized on the battle's upside-down symbolism to propose a vertiginous program: a militant Serbian irredentism to fill the vacuum of a crumbling Yugoslav political system. The whole gamut of lethal Serbian pathos was invoked: the Serbs as heroes "perennially liberating themselves and, whenever they could, helping others to be liberated"; the Serbs as a "humiliated people" needing to understand at last that "the fact that we are the big nation in this region is not a Serbian sin or shame"; the Serbs thanklessly sacrificing themselves "on the ramparts protecting European culture, religion, and society as a whole."

By the end of the speech on June 28, 1989, Milosevic came as near as such a closed man can to being in full, impassioned flight. He vowed that in the name of their rediscovered "state, national, and spiritual integrity," the Serbs were ready to fight new wars. "For six centuries now," he declared, "the heroism of Kosovo has inspired our creativity, fed our pride, and not allowed us to forget that once we were an army great, brave, and proud, one of the few that in defeat stayed undefeated. Six centuries later, today, we are again in battles and facing battles. They are not armed, although such battles cannot be excluded yet."

Back in 1989, with the Cold War waning, few people outside Yugoslavia paid much attention to these ravings of an apparatchik ex-banker turned Serbian deity. Even Washington foreign-policy wonks with Balkan experience would never have imagined that NATO's front line would quickly shift from Berlin to Sarajevo, or that in dismal Pristina the mighty alliance might one day seek a *raison-d'être* for the new millennium.

Madeleine Albright, a Georgetown professor fresh from an outing as chief foreign policy adviser to the failed presidential campaign of Michael Dukakis,

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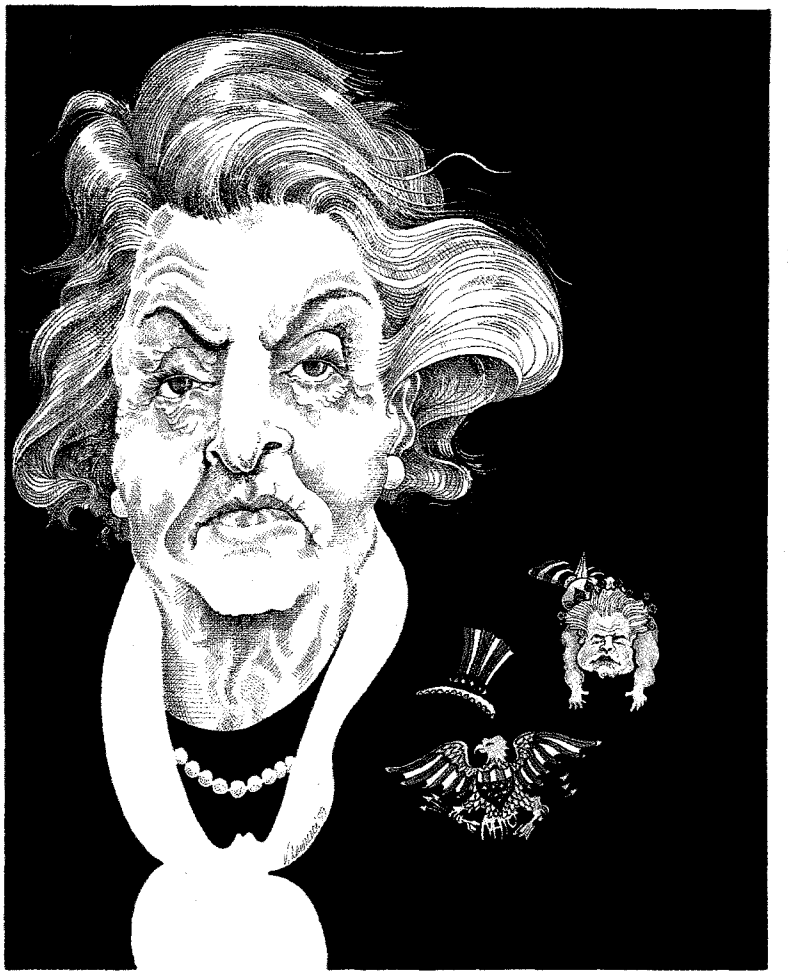
was among those with other things on their minds. She had been frustrated by Dukakis. He was never able, in her words, to break through "the threshold of machoism" necessary to be taken seriously. In Europe, she was concerned above all with the fate of her native Prague. She was about to be named president of the Center for National Policy, a liberal think tank. And she had a dying mother, Mandula Korbel, on her hands.

On October 4, 1989, three months after Milosevic spoke at Kosovo Polje, a month before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Mandula died. As portrayed in Michael Dobbs's intriguing book, she was a woman of often infectious vivacity. She was also the warm foil to Albright's darkly ambitious father, Josef Korbel. This driven man began his life as a modest Austro-Hungarian Jew, found himself in newly formed Czechoslovakia after World War I, dropped his Jewishness to survive in World War II, rose to become a polished Czechoslovak ambassador to Belgrade, fled the Communist takeover of his country in 1948, and eventually settled in Denver, where he headed the university's Graduate School of International Studies.

Along the way, Josef Korbel changed his name in order to reinvent his identity. Indeed, he hid his family background so effectively that for at least some significant part of her life—how much remains in dispute—Madeleine Albright did not know that all her forbears were Jews and that three of her grandparents died in the Holocaust. "Understanding Josef is the key to understanding Madeleine," Dobbs writes. He continues: "She inherited his easygoing social skills mixed with an iron determination. The combination of gentleness and steeliness was the product of a lifelong struggle for acceptance, both in Europe and America." From her father's uneasy construction of a successful American career on a suppressed European past, Dobbs suggests, comes his daughter's "seemingly contradictory mix of insecurity and assertiveness."

It is an interesting notion. What does seem clear is that Albright's toughness is tied to an intimate sense of European tragedy. The growing confrontation over the past decade between Milosevic and Albright, culminating in the eleven-week Kosovo war, has been unusually personal. It has involved Albright seeing the Serbian leader through the prism of her own life, a life marked by the genocidal slaughters of what Isaiah Berlin called this "most terrible century." In the place of the miserable "yes-buts" of the David Owens of this world, and in place of the world-as-quagmire of a no-body-bags Pentagon, and in place of Bill Clinton's many (belatedly regretted) meditations on the theme of the incorrigible south Slav savage, Albright has brought a certain shambolic conviction to the Balkans.



Madeleine Albright by Vint Lawrence for The New Republic

Madeleine Albright, née Marie Jana Körbelova, wanted vindication of her own past's lessons; perhaps she also wanted atonement for her own past's omissions. And so she had little choice but to cross her own "threshold of machoism." She came to see Milosevic not as a necessary evil, but as evil, period. Consider the symbolism. As a Communist, Milosevic represents the forces that drove her beloved father from his country. As the man who hounded the Muslims of Bosnia into concentration camps, and seven years later revived his trademark brutality for the Kosovar Albanians, he represents the forces that took three of her grandparents to their deaths in Terezin and Auschwitz. He appears to fuse the dark forces in Madeleine Albright's disjointed life. He is the fixed point of moral turpitude around which she has searched, often clumsily, for a Balkan policy.

Dobbs makes it clear early in his book that he believes the Secretary of State has been dishonest with him. Although the dishonesty concerns her personal life, his charge is still a serious one. Albright has claimed that it was only Dobbs's research for an article in *The Washington Post Magazine* that revealed her tragic Jewish family background to her in early 1997. He quotes Albright as remarking that "hindsight is a wonderful thing but there are things in life you just miss. I missed this." Nonsense, says Dobbs. "As I completed the research for this book," he writes, "I came to the conclusion that Madeleine learned the essential details of her family's past long before February, 1997." There are "too many contradictions and inconsistencies in her story for it to be believable." It is clear that "too many people, both in America and Europe, knew what had happened for the secret to be kept forever from such an intelligent, inquiring woman." She "stretch[es] the bounds of credibility"; she behaves with a troubling coldness after 1989 in embracing the end of the East-West conflict but doing "very little about the wall within her own family."

The evidence that Dobbs accumulates is ample. He notes that in 1996 the Czech Foreign Ministry presented Albright with the personnel records of her father. These included a birth certificate describing Josef as "Jewish and legitimate" and a letter from the Defense Ministry in 1938 that stated explicitly that "Dr. Körbel and his wife are Jews." Two years earlier, in 1994, the local newspaper in Letohrad, her father's Czech birthplace, had published a detailed account of her family's

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life and death at the hands of the Nazis. The mayor had sent a letter to Albright, then ambassador to the United Nations, presenting the story.

Dobbs chronicles Albright's meeting in Prague in 1967 with a Jewish relative named Petr Novák, who was a survivor of Terezin and Auschwitz and so "exceptionally well placed to tell her the family story in great detail." He recounts her deep historical interest in Czechoslovakia—beginning with a thesis at Wellesley in 1958—that repeatedly put her in touch with officials aware of the Korbel family background. He describes her curious shunning of her Prague cousin Dasha Šima when she began to visit Prague regularly in the 1990s, an attitude that mortified a relative who had lived with her in London during World War II. "Madeleine's claim that she needed time to do her own research into her family background is disingenuous," Dobbs concludes. "Had she wanted to verify or disprove the rumors that were swirling around her by the fall of 1996, she could have done so with a couple of telephone calls. There were any number of people who could have told her the true story, including her own first cousins in Prague and London."

BUT THE TRUE story was somehow threatening. Certainly it was at odds with the fairy-tale Albright saga, constructed by her father and consolidated by her marriage in 1959, three days after graduation from Wellesley, to Joseph Albright, a wealthy member of a newspapering dynasty with links to the *Chicago Tribune* and *Newsday*. This fairy tale involved her baptism as a Catholic in 1941, when Madeleine was four years old; her arrival in the United States when she was eleven years old; her second conversion, to Episcopalianism, to wed Albright; her rapid absorption not merely into her adopted land but into the high society of Long Island's North Shore and later Washington; and her stunning mid-life emergence from an existence dominated by motherhood and family onto a political fast-track in the Democratic Party that eventually led to her appointment as America's first female Secretary of State.

It is an almost iconic American tale, built around new identity, unimagined wealth, energetic talent, and the future's restless lure. There were struggles and pain: a stillborn child in the mid-1960s, a rough divorce in 1982. But opportunity was overwhelming. The vast new land was a clean slate: the Jewish past was erased. As Dobbs writes, "So successful was this granddaughter of a Jewish stationmaster in penetrating America's WASP Establishment that she even has a pew named after her in Washington's National Cathedral, in recognition of her services to the Episcopalian church."

And what of it? Concealing the Holocaust to escape its trauma was a common trait in Josef Korbel's assimilationist generation; his daughter's quick grasp of America's transforming possibilities was extraordinary, but it was hardly unique; and the woman's religion is ultimately her own business. All this is true. Yet it is hard to believe that this intelligent and inquisitive woman failed to grasp the truth about her origins, and the inevitability that they would one day become known, once the Berlin Wall fell and she began to visit Prague on a regular basis and information started to flow freely from the former Communist bloc. Formal recognition of that past did not come until 1997—a very long wait. It is difficult also to escape the conclusion that this odd story of a historian's manipulation of a European past, and his daughter's less-than-forthright and not-quite-credible response to that story, are central to understanding her and the Balkan half-war that she has fought.

II.

FOR MANY PEOPLE, Bosnia and now Kosovo have represented a coming of age, an abrupt understanding, in flesh and blood, of Europe's twentieth-century tragedy, and of the fact of the wholeness of a long-divided continent. Yugoslavia's protracted death, spread over four wars, has amounted to an admonition. It has been a reminder for a complacent post-war generation of the presence of the past in the bitter embers of fascism and communism that Milosevic has cynically exploited and fanned.

Albright was never a complacent American; this is one of her conspicuous qualities. Her life was always framed in terms of an escape from old-world tyranny to new-world freedom. The Danube and the Drina were always more vivid to her than the Dow. Still, in some measure she was deluded, long cut off from a family story that, when it was finally flushed into the open, imbued the camps and the killings of Milosevic's little gulag with a particularly personal resonance.

Shading the truth in various ways, Josef Korbel went to sometimes extraordinary lengths to hide the racist persecution that sent his parents to their deaths in Nazi camps. In its place, for his daughter's consumption, he placed the horror of the various betrayals of Czechoslovakia and its takeover by the Communists. "The total perfidy of the Communist mind" was Korbel's obsession, the more overwhelming because it supplanted the Holocaust.

The crimes and the capitulations that he chronicles in his books are legion: the Allied abandonment of Czechoslovakia at Munich in 1938, the weakness of the Czechoslovak president Eduard Benes ("not a leader, but a negotiator") as he confronted Hitler, the slaughter of "Czech patriots" by the Nazis, the Germanization of Czech culture, the Soviet-backed totalitarian takeover of 1948. But to the 140,000 Czechoslovak Jews, including his own parents, put to death by the Nazis, Korbel devoted scarcely a word. His book *The Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia, 1938-1948*, which appeared in 1948, is dedicated "to the memory of my parents," and it repeatedly assails the "long night of Communist totalitarianism," but it makes no mention of the Nazi slaughter.

Such an attitude goes beyond a mere desire for assimilation. It amounts, more reprehensibly, to a historian's serious distortion of the truth. Dobbs quotes Avigdor Dagan, a Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry official during the war who admired Korbel's intellect but found that "the Jewish thing was always a wall between us." Dagan, who later emigrated to Israel, says that Korbel "did everything possible to hide his Jewishness.... His ambition was obvious to everybody. I think he felt that being Jewish somehow stood in the way of realizing his ambitions."

A more charitable view, the one that his daughter has adopted, is that Korbel, whom she adored, merely wanted to protect his children from the horror his parents suffered. That is why he converted to Catholicism, dropped the umlaut on "Körbel" in a change registered in Prague in 1945 that made his name sound more Czech and less Germanic-Jewish, and raised his daughter in ignorance of her background. She had escaped—but from the Reds, not from the Nazis. This was the family myth, imparted with a European rigor right up until her father's death in 1977. As the Secretary of State says, with a certain pathos, she was long motivated by a sense "that somehow I had been saved—I thought only from the Russians."

EXACTLY WHEN DID Albright understand the full scope of her family tragedy? This is still uncertain. But it seems safe to say that her Jewish past came into sharp focus at about the same time that Milosevic revived horrors not seen in Europe since World War II. In this way, Sarajevo and Pristina cast light on her hitherto hidden or denied life. No wonder that she chose to declare in 1994, during a visit to the besieged Bosnian capital, "*Ja sam Sarajevka,*" or "I am a Sarajevan."

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Dobbs ends his book, rather weakly, by saying that Albright has so many sides, she cannot be summed up in a single sentence, adding that "she is not a saint. She is a human being." What seems clear is that a doting and perfectionist father instilled in her an unstinting desire to excel, but also left her with a trace of the brittleness of any fabricated life. Dobbs cites several questions on which Josef Korbel appears less than candid—various career moves and the provenance of some excellent paintings acquired after World War II are among them—and he contrasts the historian's high moral judgments with some of his deeds. One of those deeds was to mislead his daughter about her origins. An immigrant girl, thrust suddenly through marriage into a world of old money, was certain to feel some insecurity. In facing her past, when it finally loomed, that insecurity resurfaced, expressing itself in a disturbing mixture of emotional evasiveness and political calculation.

After all the fumbling and the prevarications, the truth was most movingly expressed following a visit to the Pinkas Synagogue in Prague, where Albright found the names of her murdered paternal grandparents, Arnošt and Olga Körbel, painted on the wall amid countless others. In all, she now avowed, more than twenty of her relatives died in Nazi concentration camps. "I have always felt that my life story is also the story of the evil of totalitarianism and the turbulence of twentieth-century Europe," she said in a statement in Prague. "To the many values and many facets that make up who I am, I now add the knowledge that my grandparents and members of my family perished in the worst catastrophe in human history."

Yet it seems fair to say, as Dobbs demonstrates, that she had in fact been "adding" that knowledge for several years. Perhaps it was subliminal, but the knowledge was certainly there. As she did so, she took in something else: the "catastrophe" that delivered her relatives to their agonizing deaths was a catastrophe with contemporary Balkan echoes, and her confrontation with it was no mere historical exercise.

III.

FOR A DECADE Slobodan Milosevic has behaved consistently, wreaking devastation in a wide arc. His actions have left over 200,000 people dead and ruined the lives of millions. With a slow-motion horror, the cynical program hatched in Kosovo a decade ago has returned to its twisted womb. Over the years, the West's approach to this singularly destructive man has changed, but only belatedly, and too late and too little to prevent the Serbian rampage in Bosnia from rolling on with a nightmarish predictability through Pristina, Pec, and Prizren.

About a year after becoming Secretary of State, as the long-simmering tensions in Kosovo intensified, Madeleine Albright vowed that this would not happen: "We are not going to stand by and watch the Serbian authorities do in Kosovo what they can no longer get away with doing in Bosnia." But then a year of dithering followed; and, although the West did not "stand by" in Kosovo as it did in Bosnia, the Serbs have now done in Kosovo precisely what they did in Bosnia, accelerating an already conceived and partially executed program of murder and eviction of Kosovo's largely ethnic Albanian population beneath the NATO bombardment. Because the West did act, there is a better chance than in Bosnia that this new round of "ethnic cleansing" can be reversed, Serbian crimes be identified with precision, and over one million ethnic Albanian refugees returned to their homes. But Kosovo, for now, is in shreds.

Given the West's frequent bouts of Balkan amnesia, it is worth noting that this huge Serbian pogrom in Kosovo was consistent with what are, by now, well-honed and well-known Serbian methods: selective execution of men of influence or fighting age, the imprisonment and torture of others, the sale of salvation for a few thousand German marks, the humiliation and the rape of subsequently evicted women, the eviction of children, the wholesale destruction of homes and mosques—all played to the tune of accusations of "genocide" against the Serbian people. Seldom in history has a people clung so tenaciously or so blindly to the image of "victims" in the hour of their murderous shame.

IT IS ALSO worth noting that Milosevic has never disguised Kosovo's central place in his nihilistic universe. His first major political act was to strip the province of its autonomy. We know from the diaries of Borisav Jovic, long a close associate, that Milosevic based his rejection of multi-party democracy in Serbia on the fact that there would then be an Albanian party "and we would lose Kosovo." When, eight years ago, Lord Carrington tried to engineer a peaceful break-up of Yugoslavia, he came up against Milosevic's bedrock contradiction: the Serbian leader wanted areas of Bosnia and Croatia on the basis of their majority Serb populations, but he also wanted Kosovo, whose population was overwhelmingly Albanian, on the basis of "history." Serbian "nationalism" was always a fancy word for grab-what-you-can-get.

Dobrica Cosic, the president of Yugoslavia from 1992 to 1993, understood the delusion. He advised Milosevic early on that parts of Kosovo would have to be ceded, and he urged the creation of a Serbian nation-state from Yugoslavia's ruins. Yet Milosevic preferred the illusion of the truncated "Yugoslavia" to which he still fatuously clings. He also preferred the treacherous rhetoric of Serbian armies "that in defeat remained undefeated" to any form of constructive coherence. The son of parents who committed suicide, he has always been Samson in the Temple, ready to deposit the Kosovo Albanians—along with the rest—beneath the spreading rubble of Serbia's victories-in-defeat.

TO HER LASTING credit, as Dobbs shows, Albright understood the man earlier than most. Her prism was Munich—and, it seems, the emergent Terezin-Auschwitz connection. For Albright, the Balkans were not the Pentagon's "Vietmalia," the preposterously cautious legacy of Vietnam and the American deaths in Somalia in 1993. Albright had lived in Serbia and she felt that she understood the Serbs' respect for force. As early as August 1993, she wrote a memorandum to the president called "Why America Must Take the Lead," suggesting that only a bombing campaign could force the Serbs to the negotiating table.

Two years later—with the West's Bosnian policy of inaction, containment, and even-handed hypocrisy still in place—the Serb massacre of several thousand Muslims at Srebrenica clearly shook her to the core. Dobbs quotes her as telling her deputy Edward Gnehn that "this happened before. I just can't believe it. We said in 1945 that we would never, ever let this happen again. It has. Look at us. It did, it did." It did, indeed: and it also happened in Bosnia in 1992 and Rwanda in 1994.

Albright told me in 1996 that one of her few moments of satisfaction during the Bosnian war came in August 1995, when she was able to show the Security Council American satellite photographs of the mass killing near Srebrenica. "It just goes to show you how awful it all was that my greatest sense of achievement came when I was finally able to bring in the pictures of Srebrenica and so show that we could prove what had happened," she said. "At that moment, I was able to use what America had in a positive way to demonstrate the horror." Of course, as we now know, there were also photographs, three years earlier, of the Serb camps; but

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they were shown to nobody, and Milosevic was invited to the London peace conference of August 1992 because the Bush administration had decided that intervention to stop the Serbian leader was undesirable. The West's Balkan *fuite en avant* has been one of truly catastrophic proportions.

How effective—rather than merely noisy—Albright was in trying to change this policy remains murky in Dobbs's book. But among the many quotations in his book—far too many, making the book appear at times like a hugely extended magazine article—is an interesting one from Anthony Lake, the former National Security Adviser. "Madeleine had a view and was able to articulate it very well," Lake says. "Her weakness was working it through and translating it into real policy terms in ways that would help convince others." This view is consistent with a widespread notion of Albright as excellent at the sound-bite expression of firm principle, but less good at thinking policy through, acting with strategic nimbleness, avoiding an America-is-best bossiness, and standing up for her principles when ambition might dictate otherwise. Her self-confidence is a lot less robust than her lapidary one-liners might suggest. Her frankness, like her father's, is a lot less clear-cut than she projects. Under questioning, she is not quick on her feet, tied as she is by fear of putting a foot wrong and appearing less than totally in control.

"She got to where she is today," Dobbs observes, "not by rebelling but by conforming. Her entire life—and the life of at least three generations of her ancestors—has been marked by a struggle for acceptance. As an immigrant and a woman, she was in a doubly vulnerable position. She had to prove her loyalty and indispensability over and over again." On Bosnia, from her post at the United Nations, she railed with commendable persistence, but she also conformed, with an attempted nudge here and there, to the craven policy of the president whom she was serving.

IV.

KOSOVO HAS BEEN another matter. Operation Allied Force has not quite been "Madeleine's War," in the Washington phrase, but it has been something very close to it. Albright will be judged, in large measure, by the results of the conflict.

The run-up to the NATO bombardment, which began on March 24, was bizarre in many respects. The Serbian massacre of more than forty ethnic Albanians at Racak on January 15, 1999 clearly injected a belated urgency into Western efforts to stop the fighting in Kosovo and led to the convocation of a sort of Dayton *bis* at Rambouillet, near Paris. Albright played a central role in the negotiation, conducted under the threat of NATO bombing. In the absence of Milosevic, however, there was precious little "negotiation." And when the fragmented Albanian delegation finally agreed to terms—including substantial autonomy for Kosovo, the deployment of a NATO force, and a review of Kosovo's status in three years time—the Secretary of State acquiesced to an event perhaps unique in diplomatic history: the public signing by one party of an "accord" that was not an accord at all, because the other party had rejected it.

It was a curious ceremony, and it was clearly a stage-managed prelude to war. Surely the corollary of this sort of one-sided approach ought to have been the prompt deployment of a significant NATO military force on Kosovo's southern borders. Such a force might have made Milosevic think twice about his defiance, and it might have acted as a deterrent to Serbian atrocities if he continued in his defiance and used NATO bombing to move ruthlessly against the Albanians and the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Mountains of verbiage about Serbian valor notwithstanding, the Serbian army

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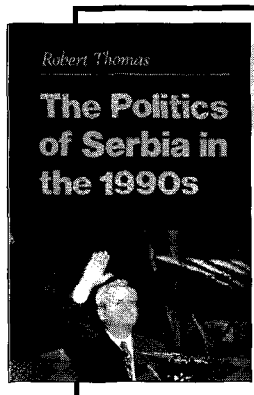

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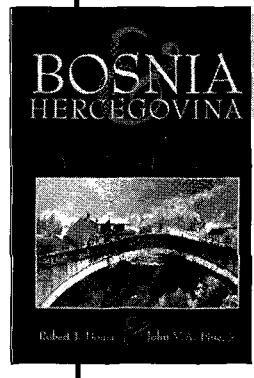

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has distinguished itself over the past eight years only by its ruthless effectiveness against unarmed civilians, and by its lack of any stomach or talent for anything that could be reasonably dignified with the term "war," in the sense of a conflict between armies. It is very likely that a NATO invasion would have been met not by defiance but by flight. Yet NATO did not have the resolve for such a course, and the Pentagon did not have the requisite tolerance for casualties. And so NATO bombed; and bombed and bombed and bombed. After Milosevic's decade of terror, it was the right policy, the just policy, the honorable policy—and the belated policy.

ALBRIGHT'S INSTINCTS were right, but her preparation was wayward. The campaign was ineptly planned, based on her false premise that a few days of rather mild and highly selective bombing would lead Milosevic to sue for peace. Operation Allied Force was marked also by the handicap of trying to engage in that modern military perversion, a "no-loss" war, and so a war without ground troops. For days after the bombing began, the Serbs roamed Kosovo with murderous impunity; the thousands of Albanian lives lost then were lost in part to the terrible misjudgment of American policymakers. As François Heisbourg has written, "War is a contest of wills, and a protagonist who demonstrates a complete unwillingness to run risks is unlikely to bend his adversary's will. The 'zero-loss' constraint also leads targeters to destroy easy-to-reach assets rather than run the risks required to destroy what is militarily relevant to the alliance's proclaimed war aims." I would add that an objective for which an army is willing to fight but not willing to die is one that will only be partially attained, at best.

Needless to say, Albright could not single-handedly sway the Pentagon. Indeed, her influence on the actual war planning appears to have been slight. It was probably not helped by the fact that, as an official at the National Security Council in the Carter administration, she had penned a rather poisonous note on then-Senator William S. Cohen: "He has an overestimation of his intellectual capabilities but is a clever self-promoter."

The NATO bombardment almost certainly went on much longer owing to the imprecision of the high-altitude bombing imposed for safety reasons, and to the American hesitation about going for punishing targets. For this reason, the "collateral damage"—including the destruction of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade—was wider than it might have been. (Still, I spent too long in Sarajevo to rouse any sympathy for Serbian victims of misdirected bombs.) The huge Albanian exodus was crueler. The general outcome has been messy; the toll, human and financial, has been onerous.

Without a doubt, Albright's circumscribed war against Milosevic was better than no war at all, and it has led to a defeat for the Yugoslav army. Yet a genuine victory cannot be claimed as long as Milosevic still presides over Serbia. Experience overwhelmingly suggests that his presence in power is incompatible with Balkan stability. It is certainly incompatible with the "Europe whole and free" that has been the West's avowed goal since the end of the Cold War. But the means to achieve that goal—the use of ground troops to defeat Milosevic's tottering Serbia—was again eschewed in the Kosovo war. As a result, the status of Kosovo remains ripe with potentially explosive ambiguity, and Serbia remains the sick man of Europe. While Western leaders talk of a protectorate independent of Belgrade in all but name, Milosevic talks of his enduring sovereignty and claims, not without any plausibility, that his eleven-week defiance eliminated "questions on possible independence for Kosovo raised before the aggression." It is true, and troubling, that the review of Kosovo's status after three years promised at Rambouillet has been dropped in the agreement with Milosevic.

ENORMOUS QUESTIONS remain, and NATO's standing—as well as Albright's—will hinge in part on how they are answered. Will most of the refugees go back? Will the Kosovo Liberation Army, its ranks swelled by the exodus and Serbian cruelty, fulfill its promise to disarm when no prospect of independence is held out in the accord reached between the West and Milosevic? Will an effective NATO chain of command exist that ensures that the Russians and the Serbs do no mischief? What status is Kosovo ultimately to be accorded? Will the West seriously seek the ousting of Milosevic, as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair now suggest?

And yet there have been some real achievements, for which the Secretary of State deserves real credit. Serbian troops and paramilitary thugs have been forced out of Kosovo, the province that propelled Milosevic's rise to power and may now, when the dust settles, become the source of his downfall. Disavowed even by the Serbian Orthodox Church, which has called for his resignation—it was offended by his failure in Kosovo, not by his atrocities there—Milosevic seems increasingly isolated and vulnerable. The wars that emanated from Belgrade for almost a decade—to Slovenia, to Croatia, to Bosnia—have finally been brought home to the Serbian heartland. A good principle, albeit one that requires application with prudence, has been established at the end of a century of manifold horror: a state engaging in gross and massive violations of human rights will not be protected by its "sovereignty."

Europe has been galvanized to regard itself as a military entity as well as a commercial entity. In this sense, to use a phrase doing the rounds in Germany, Kosovo has been a kind of "military euro." Spurred by the atrocities of the war, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has at last indicted Milosevic. How gratifying it was, after all the mealy-mouthed official descriptions of the man since 1989, to hear Louise Arbour, the chief prosecutor, say simply that she had put out an international arrest warrant for the Serbian leader. And she added a useful reflection: the evidence raised "serious questions" about how Milosevic could be the guarantor "of any deal, let alone a peace agreement."

Of course, the same sort of evidence existed in 1995, when Milosevic came to Dayton. One salutary effect of the Kosovo conflict has been that it has led Bill Clinton to look back in anguish. His statement last month to a veterans' group was extraordinary:

> There are those who say Europe and its North American allies have no business intervening in the ethnic conflicts of the Balkans. They are the inevitable results, these conflicts, according to some, of centuries-old animosities, which were unleashed by the end of the Cold War restraints in Yugoslavia and elsewhere. I myself have been guilty of saying that on an occasion or two and I regret it now, more than I can say.... We do no favors to ourselves or the rest of the world when we justify looking away from this kind of slaughter by oversimplifying and conveniently in our own way demonizing the whole Balkans by saying that these people are incapable of civilized behavior with one another.

The President's words will not bring back the dead who perished in Bosnia as the West waved away the slaughter with that long-pervasive and dismally dismissive phrase, "This is the Balkans, you know." The Balkans, as well as other conflict-ridden parts of the world, have paid a high price for Bill Clinton's learning curve. Still, his recent words were important; and they reflect a view espoused by Albright long before others in high office in Washington.

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V.

In his superbly researched book, Michael Dobbs has performed a significant service in bringing together the threads of a life that—like the 73-year existence of Yugoslavia itself—reflects major themes of the twentieth century: fascist terror, communist oppression, the nationalist fever of post-Communist societies, America's changing role in the world. This is not an elegant book. Its prose rarely takes flight, and its pace can be plodding. But in its way it is a rigorous and important book.

In 1942, just before she was deported from Prague to her death at Auschwitz, Albright's grandmother Olga Körbel wrote a letter to her daughter Grete and son-in-law Rudolf Deiml:

> It was exactly 9:45 a.m. when they brought us the summons. I don't think I will be able to do much today. First of all, I have to get used to the thought that we are actually leaving. I am going to wash my hair, I am going to do some shopping, and I am going to clean the house. In the evening, I will prepare dough for the challah bread from 1.5 kilos of flour. I will bake the bread in the morning....
>
> I hope that once I get [to Terezin], I will calm down. I am not calm right now. In fact, I haven't been calm for a long time. Especially yesterday. I learned the news that Anka Weilova has committed suicide. I felt sorry for her parents.... I would like to ask you, my dear Gretichka, not to waste your strength worrying about us. You will need it for yourself. I promise that I have a very strong will to survive. Somewhere, in some foreign land, we will meet again. I hope that God will help us, and I beg Him to take you under His wing.
>
> Father must take [Drollo] to the pound, where they are collecting the dogs of the Jews. I know that he will feel awful, but I also feel sorry for the dog.

As she was leaving the next day, Olga scribbled a last note that ended: "I am strong. I think we will see each other somewhere on the other shore. I kiss you with passion, your Mummy." Over the next two years, Olga and her husband Arnošt would die in the Holocaust. So, too, would Grete, her husband Rudolf, and their twelve-year-old daughter Milena.

It is poignant to think that, for many years, Madeleine Albright was denied knowledge of these crimes against her immediate family; and it is disturbing to contemplate her awkward, stumbling course toward a public avowal of this past. She was a child of a divided world, and she carries its wounds. In the latter part of her life, at least, she seems to have strived—haltingly but with a kind of flailing conviction—to make whole the emotional links that led her to fight for Kosovo. This was the "other shore" on which she finally encountered her murdered relatives.

On his return from a visit to central Europe, Dobbs presented Albright with a photograph of herself, Milena, and her cousin Dasha as young girls in Czechoslovakia, and asked if she could identify each of them. As he recounts early in his book, Albright instantly replied that she recognized everybody. Then she pointed to her cousin Milena—who was killed in 1944 at Auschwitz—and said: "This is me." What a shattering moment, of simultaneous truth and error, this must have been!

It is safe to say that in the long lines of Hadzics and Mrehics and Sestovics taken to their deaths in Serbian camps in Bosnia, and now in the Beqiris and Imeris and Jasharis slaughtered in Kosovo, Albright glimpsed her own flesh and blood. Her Balkan challenge has amounted to a kind of agonizing reconciliation. And that, on balance, has been good for blithe Bill Clinton and his blithe America. ■

Inversions

By André Aciman

Marcel Proust by Edmund White

(Lipper/Viking, 165 pp., $19.95)

I.

Scarcely halfway between L'Étoile and Place de la Concorde, across from the Grand Palais on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, lies a row of landscaped parks dotted with trees and chestnut alleys through which runs a very tiny, winding path called Allée Marcel Proust. The average person may think that it is nothing more than a vague botanical tribute to an author known for writing affectingly about flowers and plants; or, more grandly, an expression of civic gratitude to this city's, and this century's, most celebrated French author. But Proust's close readers will know that the Allée Marcel Proust represents one of those wistful and stimulating moments where the world of letters and the world of facts collide. For it was precisely here, if we go by what Proust wrote in *Within a Budding Grove*, the second volume of *In Search of Lost Time*, that Marcel, the narrator, used to rush after school to come to play with his adolescent friend Gilberte Swann, with whom he was smitten.

Proust's biographers have identified the model for Swann's daughter in a certain Marie de Benardaky, the daughter of a wealthy Slavic—some say Russian, others say Polish—aristocrat, of probable Cretan origin. Marie would come with her sister and their governess to the Champs-Élysées gardens, where they would meet the daughters of Félix Faure—the future president of France—and play hide and seek with schoolboys from the Lycée Condorcet. These after-school gatherings must have left an indelible impression on Proust, who was never to forget Marie de Benardaky. Five years before his death, he told Louisa de Mornand, his life-long friend and the actress who served as a model for the character of Rachel in his novel, that Marie had been "the great love of his life," for whom "he would have killed himself."

Proust, gifted as he was with so munificent a memory, had a way of screening the particulars of his life when he transposed them into his fiction. A novelist who ended up writing this century's most fastidiously detailed memoir, he had little compunction about embroidering things, and he cherished his embroideries. In the matter of his love of the Champs-Élysées gardens, for example, we do not know Proust's precise age at the time: was he thirteen, or fourteen, or fifteen, which his fiction seems to suggest? Or, as he implied in his letter to Louisa de Mornand, was he really eighteen, an age when Proust was already eagerly pursuing the love of men?

And was he frank with Louisa de Mornand? He had had a passing crush on Louisa, though it, too, is not entirely clear. George Painter, in his great biog-

André Aciman teaches at Bard College. His new book, *False Papers*, will be published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux later this year.

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raphy *Marcel Proust* (1959), suggests that Proust "succumbed to her charm partly because she was the beloved of [his] friend [Louis d'Albufera], but partly for her own sake." Jean-Yves Tadié's recent *Marcel Proust* takes a more speculative, if fussier, approach: "If Marcel Proust feigned to be in love with Louisa de Mornand, it was to stir the jealousy of the man ... because he was under the mistaken hope of rousing his love for him, given his belief that it is jealousy which gives birth to love, and not the other way around." Had Marcel really wished to die for Marie, or was he exaggerating his love to an old flame so as to cover up his other desires?

PROUST WAS NEVER ABLE to let go of the girl and the events in the Champs-Élysées gardens. He returned to the scene not only in *In Search of Lost Time*, but also in his earlier novel *Jean Santeuil* (where Marie de Benardaky is called Marie Kossichef), and in a posthumous collection of essays called *Against Sainte-Beuve*. The Champs-Élysées garden, with its adjoining theater, fountain, and public urinal (which exudes a smell that the young Marcel finds vaguely familiar), becomes in his writing a site of play and anxiety, of unfulfilled longing and near-plenitude—a genuine crucible, where the fear of not finding Marie/Gilberte forever undermines the hope that she will be kind to him or that he will not seem too awkward.

Marcel sits at home, scanning the ray of sunlight against the balcony, wondering whether sunlight might indeed presage weather sufficiently pleasant to coax Gilberte Swann out to join him in the gardens. He watches the ray of light wax and then wane—no, the day is too cloudy—but soon enough it reappears, a propitious sign. With his governess Françoise, the hapless youth saunters toward the Champs-Élysées while the reader, already fearing the worst, suspects that he will not find the object of his affection in the garden, if for no other reason than that he allowed himself to invest so many hopes in their encounter.

Sure enough, the reader's fears are borne out. Gilberte does not show up. And the boy is crushed. But when he has given up hoping, when he is dragging himself home and resigning himself again to the lesson that things never turn out as we wish, whom should he see coming his way but the very girl whose absence he was trying to endure? As Proust observes, our wish for things only obstructs them—for things "come to fruition only when we cease to desire" them or, when they do seem to lean our way, we will "effect a gradual change in our heart until we desire something other than what we are about to possess."

In his short biography of Proust, Edmund White nicely summarizes the ironic law of Proustian psychodynamics: "You always get what you want when you no longer want it." Such laws, of course, are not laws at all. This is really an observation on the natural inversions of the mind. For the mind is constantly making connections that our reason knows do not exist. Our memories, and our desires, and our views of people, and our judgments of things: all are connections that seem right but turn out to be wrong, only to prove right again, but are really wrong in the end, as though to suggest that fate never works the way we want it to work, but this hard knowledge will not propitiate it any more than it will blunt its power to cause us pain.

EVERYTHING IN PROUST is antithetical and contrapuntal. Proust narrated life according to a fugal principle. His story, his episodes, his thoughts, his characters and their sexualities, his sentences even, all abide by what one could call a poetics of inversion. There is no right side-up or upside down; there are simply reversals of one thing by another. Instead of staunch womanizers, it becomes clear that "almost all" of Proust's male characters, with the exception of Marcel, "turn out to be gay." (The words are White's.) You might say that the contribution of this great *inverti* was to develop a poetics that was not entirely free of his own inversion—indeed, that universalized inversion into an almost cosmic principle, by applying it to everything and everyone. It almost seems as though, in his writing, Proust was "outing" all of reality, by assuming that reality likes to hide, that all of nature and life was a cipher craving to be (this was Proust's word) translated.

Proust had an appetite for cutting things open. He relentlessly turned things inside out, like gloves, upside down and back and around again. He prized what he uncovered as though it were his own little discovery, his own little version of the world, a world more real than the real world because it was made in his own image and in no one else's image, but a world that he must especially distrust, because it is made in his own and no one else's image. Inversion is Proust's studied and spontaneous response to the world. He cannot begin to write unless he can first expose the real world for the sham that he always feared, and wished, that it was. The real world frequently behaves like a bad novel; and fiction has a few things to teach life that life would do well to learn.

Neither the world as it is nor the world as Proust thinks it is will ever have the upper hand. As soon as the one prevails, the other unseats it. As soon as Proust's unmistakably soulful and lyrical voice begins to try to reach out for the world, it is almost instantly undercut by Proust's grand and unmistakable irony. He would like nothing more than to think that writing is better than living, that those who hide and write and live alone have better, richer lives—and perhaps a part of him does believe this; but he also knows there is something wrong with such a claim, that it is "a cowardly abdication of life," that it is better to be of the world than to remember having tried to be, just as it is better to live than to observe life—though he writes all this in the seclusion of his cork-lined room. Wanting to know how you desire what you desire when you desire it is, in the end, nothing more than a way of hoping to find that you may not desire it at all. But proving that you no longer desire it makes it safe to desire it again, which you secretly suspect that you do anyway.

PROUST'S UNIVERSE MAY have a center, but it is without a core. When you have reached the alleged center, you will have discovered that there is nothing left, just as, by the time Marcel decides to become a writer at the end of *In Search of Lost Time*, he will have just finished writing the very novel that narrates the history of his decision to write it. Similarly, by the time Swann kisses Odette that first night after running into her in the street, he knows that he is about to lose far more than he stands to gain; and by the time he marries her, he has already grown indifferent to her betrayals and is ready to undertake some of his own. And by the time his daughter Gilberte invites Marcel to the Swanns' home, years later, marking Marcel's entry into a world that had hitherto seemed so lofty and unattainable, he will be spurned by the very girl who has opened her home to him.

In a version of the scene in the Champs-Élysées gardens published in the addendum to the four-volume Pléiade edition of *À la recherche* in 1986, young Marcel and Gilberte are sitting near a fountain far from the vigilant gaze of her governess, who is busy reading. The two are talking, and occasionally they cast furtive looks through the laurel shrubberies in the direction of the governess. As they say goodbye, Gilberte takes Marcel's hand and kisses it. This burst of human contact—rare enough in Marcel's world, but especially rare since it is the girl, and not the boy, who initiates it—thrills him, and the young man begins to kiss her on the

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cheek, rubbing his lips along her skin as though stirred by "a hereditary, new power working within him," until she reveals to him that she too is dazed.

Halfway through the scene, and for no immediately understandable reason, Proust alters the "I" of the narrator to "he." Such a change is not uncommon in Proust's manuscripts. Proust had no compunction about moving things around, switching scenes or the name, the sex, and the personality of his characters, as though the facts of his tale were immaterial or unavailable, shifty, lost, repressed, and therefore open to continual revision. It is no wonder, in this essentially unstable universe, that the final version of the scene between Marcel and Gilberte in the Champs-Élysées changes things again, and very startlingly.

In the scene as it appears in *Within a Budding Grove*, Marcel and Gilberte are no longer so coy with each other. Marcel, who is trying to snatch back a letter that he had asked her to deliver to her father, finds himself physically struggling with her. Each innocently goads the other to put up a fight, the boy trying to pin her down by wrapping his legs around her, as she resists, laughing and grappling with him all the while. And suddenly, and as though totally unaware of what was about to happen to him, Marcel ejaculates:

> I held her gripped between my legs like a young tree which I was trying to climb; and, in the middle of my gymnastics, when I was already out of breath with the muscular exercise and heat of the game, I felt, like a few drops of sweat wrung from me by an effort, my pleasure express itself in a form which I could not even pause for a moment to analyze.

Gilberte does not seem to realize what has happened. She kindly offers to go on wrestling "if he so wishes."

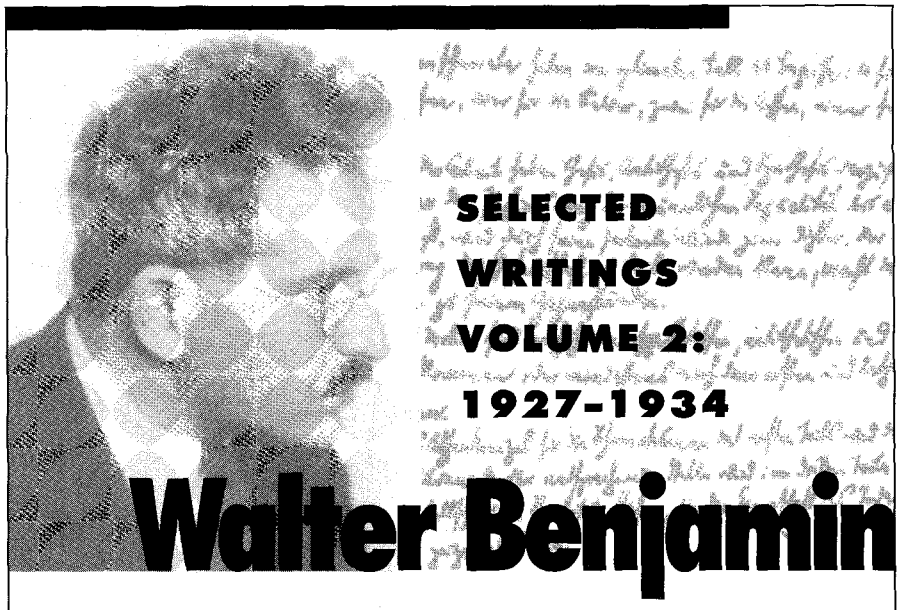
It would be just like Proust to "dispossess" a sexual act. Contact, to say nothing of intimacy, between individuals is so scarce and so strange an occurrence in Proust that the distance between one person and another is indeed, to use his word, *infranchissable*: unbreachable, impassable. Elsewhere in the novel, playing with the sexual meaning of "possession," Proust will remind his reader that no one ever possesses anything, much less anyone. Speculation is the norm, not intimacy. Thus the little joy that the young man experiences upon ejaculation is quickly snuffed out, as he begins to fear that Gilberte may have had an inkling of what had resulted from their wrestling.

> Perhaps she was dimly conscious that my game had another object than the one I had avowed, but too dimly to have been able to see that I had attained it. And I who was afraid that she had noticed (and a slight movement of recoil and constraint as of offended modesty which she made and checked a moment later made me think that my fear had not been unfounded) agreed to go on wrestling, lest she should suppose that I had indeed had no other object in view than the one which I wished only to sit quietly by her side.

Did she sense that he sensed that she sensed the true nature of his pleasure? Marcel puts himself in her place to judge whether she is aware of what he suspects she must have guessed about him. The inversion of roles is potentially infinite. But that he should not be allowed to experience the plenitude of the moment, that he should continue to wrestle with meanings and intentions even after attaining the object of his exertions: therein lies the moral of Proust's book. Happiness and love are not the same thing. They do not go together.

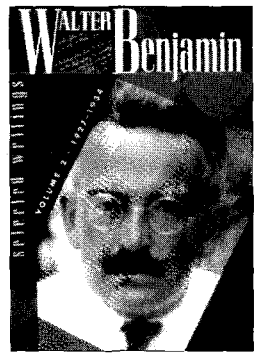
II.

THERE IS ANOTHER inversion in the scene in the garden. If Proust changed Marie Benardaky into Marie Kossichef and then into Gilberte



MICHAEL W. JENNINGS, GENERAL EDITOR

In the frenzied final years of the Weimar Republic, amid economic collapse and mounting political catastrophe, Walter Benjamin emerged as the most original practicing literary critic and public intellectual in the German-speaking world. Volume 2 of *Selected Writings*, covering the years 1927 to 1934, displays the full spectrum of Benjamin's achievements at this pivotal stage in his career.



Previously concerned chiefly with literary theory, Benjamin during these years does pioneering work in new areas, from the study of popular culture (a discipline he virtually created) to theories of the media and the visual arts. His writings on the theory of modernity—most of them new to readers of English—develop ideas as important to an understanding of the twentieth century as any contained in his widely anthologized essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility."

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photo: Walter Benjamin, 1929. photo by Charlotte Joël. Courtesy Theodor W. Adorno Archiv, Frankfurt, Germany

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Swann, and if he changed "I" into "he," there was another switch that he was probably reluctant to disclose, and it is the most obvious one of all: that Gilberte, in the scene by the laurel shrubbery, is very probably not a "she" but a "he." There is something quite unseemly about the upper-middle-class adolescent youth struggling in a public playground with an aristocratic girl, pinning her down, and finally coming in his pants. Surely such wrestling is done between boys.

Edmund White, like almost every Proustian biographer, is extremely fond of repeating that Proust transposed almost everything from his life and then inverted the terms: he borrowed the scenes but altered the sex of the characters, thereby inverting the invert. The task of the biographer, therefore, is to go against Proust's grain: to de-heterosexualize him, which is to say, to de-invert the invert.

This theme is extremely precious to White. In his small book he is constantly highlighting the fact that the women whom Marcel and Swann love were most probably not women at all. We are told more than once that Swann's desperate search for Odette in after-hours Paris is just an echo of Marcel's own desperate search for his lover Reynaldo Hahn one night in Paris. White is in good company here, to be sure. All of Proust's biographers, long before the advent of Queer Theory, have contended that the Swann-Odette nexus could be traced back to the Albufera-Mornand relationship, which, in its turn, served as a model for the Rachel-Saint-Loup liaison in the novel, even though it was the character Saint-Loup who, before turning gay, would eventually marry Gilberte, while Marcel would fall for Albertine, herself gay, and a composite of, among other males, Henri Rochat and Alfred Agostinelli. Some have gone so far as to detect in Gilberte's features the lineaments of a man's body, or in Albertine's exaggerated tomboyishness the tell-tale signs of a *kouros*.

CERTAIN GAY READERS cannot resist this sort of exegesis. In a way, it seems understandable that a novel that suggests that everyone is gay should be given an enthusiastic and explicit gay reading. The homosexuality of this work is not exactly esoteric. And so some critics have tried to establish a gay lineage to *In Search of Lost Time*. If the primal scene occurs not in the Proust's home but in his aunt Tante Léonie's house in Combray, then surely the novel's matriarchal or patriarchal derivation collapses in favor of a tantiarchal model. *Tante*, after all, is a common slang word for "queer," which Proust himself uses in his novel.

This "avuncular" aesthetic lineage, which also includes a shady uncle and the elusive figure of Charles Swann, is established in the famous dipping of the *madeleine* in the tea, a sort of mnemonic "open sesame" that sets the novel in motion when, one day, Marcel suddenly recalls the flavor of herbal infusions of his childhood and, by extension, the lost paradise of his aunt's house. According to queer theorists such as Jarrod Hayes—a young scholar whose essay "Proust in the Tearoom" appeared in 1995 in the *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, suggesting that even tea can acquire a gay meaning in Proust—"the paradise regained by Proustian memory could be Sodom." Tea parties, teacups, teapots, and tearooms turn out to have a decidedly gay inflection. Secondary sources such as *Paris Gay 1925* and Colin and Mével's *Dictionnaire de l'argot* reveal that the word *théière* (teapot) "first appeared in print with a homosexual connotation in 1890, *prendre le thé* (to have tea) in 1910 and *tasse* (teacup)." Put it all together, and *voilà*: every time Proust mentions the *signifiant* tea, he is of course thinking of its gay *signifié*. By means of such a tortured and tendentious hermeneutic, a reading of Proust may be generated that is exultant, highly professional, shrewdly decrypted, politicized, tactless, and pure claptrap.

IF ANYTHING IS likely to make Proust turn in his grave in Père Lachaise, it is precisely such interpretations. Proust never managed to bring himself to make broad admissions of his homosexuality. Like Wilde before him, he was enough of a secret homosexual to have sought public redress against homosexual allegations. (In 1897, he challenged a slanderer to what turned out to be a perfunctory duel.) Indeed, as readers could easily have inferred from *In Search of Lost Time* and *Against Sainte-Beuve*, and as both Jean-Yves Tadié in *Marcel Proust* and Roger Duchêne in *L'Impossible Marcel Proust* have suggested, the sexuality that Proust practiced most was neither homosexual nor heterosexual. It was onanistic.

This does not mean he was any less gay; but it does suggest that his sexuality was essentially reclusive. Proust certainly believed that a writer's private life must never impinge on the appreciation and the interpretation of his books. This was why he so adamantly opposed Sainte-Beuve's critical method, which allowed a critic to judge a writer not by his work but by the facts of his life. White quotes Proust's words to this effect: "A book is the product of a different self from the one we manifest in our habits, our social life and our vices."

And yet the one thing that White systematically fails to do in his book about Proust is to heed those very words. His *Marcel Proust* is crudely and almost exclusively aimed to provide a gay reading, not of Proust's novel, but of Proust's life. Without such a purpose, indeed, it is hard to understand how or why this book came into being. After all, White's biography appears in the wake of five mammoth-sized Proust biographies: Ghislain de Diesbach's (1991) of 775 pages, followed by Roger Duchêne's (1994) of 845 pages, topped by Jean-Yves Tadié's (1996) of 952 pages (soon to appear in English), to say nothing of the reissued English-language classic biography by George Painter (1959) at 782 pages, and Ronald Hayman's (1990) less popular but still hefty 564-page biography. Understandably, there are readers who may be reluctant to embark on biographies that, by their sheer girth, seem intended to rival the subject's own voluminous novel. Proust's life, when all is said and done, was the rather short, uneventful story, as White himself so cogently puts it, of a man who is "half-Jewish, untitled, gay and an invalid." A short biography could have been usefully distilled from the sea of Proust scholarship.

But this is precisely what White has not done. His very superficial account seems to have been drawn mainly from George Painter and Jean-Yves Tadié. It is a chatty, cut-and-paste job, and slovenly written. There are the gay highlights of Proust's life, with a gay who's-who of the period, and lots of padding in between. Whom is this book intended for? Not the specialist, of course. But the reader of Proust will also profit nothing from it. No, the purpose of the book is to give a sense of what and who Proust was to people who would not be interested in him unless he were gay.

WHEN HE MENTIONS Proust's interest in ballet, for example, White must remind us that Proust admired Diaghilev and, naturally, his lover Nijinsky. Also, "the handsome, young Fénelon, the third of Proust's new friends, was also secretly homosexual, or rather bisexual." Also, there is "Jean Lorrain, a decadent novelist (and like Marcel a homosexual and inveterate partygoer)." When he refers to Walter Benjamin, White lists his sexual orientation, too, as if Benjamin could have been mistaken for anything but what he was: "According to the German (and heterosexual) essayist Walter Benjamin..." Of course White gives us Oscar Wilde, Georges Eekhoud, Friedrich Alfred Krupp, Sir Hector Archibald Macdonald, and Count Kuno von Moltke. The language of White's propa-

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ganda is hip and totally anachronistic: we read of "hustling," "cruising," the Paris Disneyland, Method acting, mitosis, Proust the "yenta," comic strips, and so on.

White's thinking is also trite. "Modern readers are responsive to Proust's tireless and brilliant analyses of love because we, too, no longer take love for granted." (And barely a page later: "Like us, he took nothing for granted.") Writing of the rich of Proust's Paris, White remarks that they were "enriched by colonies ... [having] drained the world dry to pay for [their] excesses." What on earth do such banalities and politicizations have to do with Proust?

Discussing Proust's penchant for writing pastiches, and his reasons for avoiding imitating "simple and straightforward" writers such as Voltaire or Mérimée, White explains that he did this "just as drag queens avoid 'doing' unadorned beauties such as Audrey Hepburn and are inspired by highly constructed women such as Mae West or Barbra Streisand." The critical focus here seems a little narrow. The same parochialism appears in White's attempt to assist the reader with Proust's debt to Ruskin. (With the help of others, Proust translated two of Ruskin's books.) Hoping to give his readers a sense of who Ruskin was, White instructs that "his doctrines ... had a particular impact on the San Francisco Bay region shingle style of architecture." This is the literary equivalent of niche marketing.

And there are also untendentious mistakes. Describing Proust's last day, White writes that "Robert Proust [Proust's brother was a doctor] bled him (the common treatment for lowering fever) by applying suction cups." Never in the history of medicine have suction cups ever been used to bleed anyone. (The biographers tell of *ventouses*, which were not bleeding instruments.) White calls the Duke of Saint-Simon a diarist, when he was a memorialist. Twice White mentions "the (then) famous Alphonse Daudet ... now largely forgotten," but a look in any bookstore in France will show that Daudet is not even mildly forgotten. Small things, but they matter in a small book.

"Proust's strategies of disguise and transposition," White argues, "must still begin and end with a highly specific recollection of his own feelings and sensations." This is White's methodological assumption, the premise that justifies his shallow sexualization of his entire subject. Now, there is no reason that a biographer should adhere to Proust's separation of the writer and the work. It is the job of the biographer, indeed, to challenge such a separation; but the challenge must be a subtle and learned one. White's facile connections are another matter entirely. In their obsession with the realities of sexual inversion, they violate the realities of artistic inversion. For Proust's thinking was tirelessly, sublimely antithetical. This was the lesson of the agony in the garden, the endlessly shifting agony of a man's search for himself, for love, for his past. You would know nothing of these gorgeous complexities from this book.

III.

In a recently discovered letter dated May 17, 1888, a sixteen-year-old Marcel Proust writes to his maternal grandfather urgently requesting thirteen francs. "This is why," he confides. "I needed to see a prostitute so badly to put an end to my bad habit of masturbating, that my father gave me ten francs to visit a brothel. But, in my excitement, I broke a chamber pot: three francs. Moreover, flustered as I was, I was unable to screw."

One could speculate at great length on the nature of the relationship between Proust and his Jewish grandfather, or between him and his father, the world-renowned physician, who begged his son to try to stop masturbating "for at least four days." One could even ponder the multiple sides of this young man who had clumsily broken a prostitute's chamber pot and, all the while penning adoring love letters to his male classmates, pined for Marie de Benardaky in the Champs-Élysées Gardens. Such ambivalence should surprise no one; Proust made great art out of ambivalence. But what is really interesting in this conjunction is not the father, the son, the grandfather, the whore, the uncles, the aunts, or the would-be male and female flames. It is the pot.

Fast forward, several decades later, to *The Captive*. A grown-up and prosperous Marcel, on hearing that his live-in mistress Albertine fears that the Verdurin circle might spurn her inferior social status, rashly offers to invite the Verdurins to a "grand dinner." Taken aback by her lover's suggestion, Albertine exclaims "Spend money on them! I'd a great deal rather you left me free for once in a way to go and get myself b...." I take this sentence from D.J. Enright's reworking of Terence Kilmartin's own reworking of the Scott Moncrieff translation of 1927. The sentence trails off with an ellipsis in French as well: "*me faire casser....*" The Moncrieff version is far more circumspect: "I'd a great deal rather you left me alone for once in a way so that I can go and get someone decent to break my...."

Albertine never finishes this sentence, but immediately she blushes, thereby intriguing Marcel who, like all Proustian lovers, is consumed with jealousy. He

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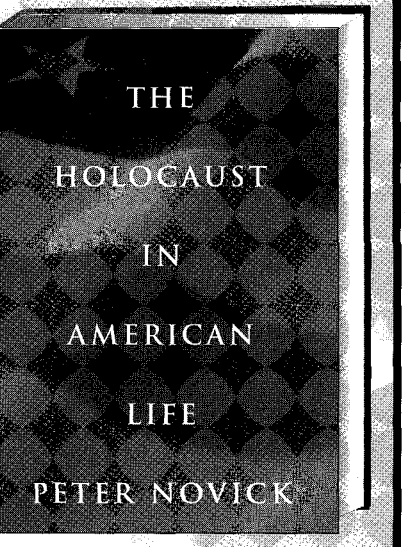

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insists that she tell him what she had meant to say, but she refuses. He even attempts to reconstruct the missing word by filling the ellipses with all manner of nouns and meanings. Finally, struck by a dark revelation, Marcel trips on the missing word. It could only have been "pot."

Se faire casser le pot, "to get someone to break," as Scott Moncrieff enigmatically renders it, or "to have one's pot broken," as Enright glosses it, means to have anal intercourse: passive anal intercourse. But would a girl, even the crassest girl, ever say such a thing? Or would it have to be a man? There is that question again, the question about sexual identity and artistic meaning, the question that was broached by Marcel's bout with Gilberte in the garden.

Would the answer to such a question really tell us anything essential about Proust or his novel? Would a critic's temptation to connect the broken pot in *The Captive* with the broken pot in the adolescent's letter reveal anything of any artistic or spiritual consequence? Was the young Proust inadvertently revealing something coded to his grandfather? Was the adult Proust retrospectively writing to connect the two? Was the broken pot a broken *pot*? Had the young man gone to see a female prostitute? Is there a teapot hidden in the chamber pot? Should we care?

We should care, but not for Proust's sake. We should care for our own sake, because our universities are training generations of students and scholars to sexualize the universe, and to search breathlessly for spurious meanings and esoteric messages and titillating codes, and to leave the lasting beauty behind. ■

The Sea and the Text

By PETER GREEN

The Returns of Odysseus: Colonization and Ethnicity by Irad Malkin

(University of California Press, 331 pp., $45)

Celebrating Homer's Landscapes: Troy and Ithaca Revisited by J.V. Luce

(Yale University Press, 260 pp., $35)

FOR THE MODERN traveler, Greece and its environs seem surprisingly small, a sea-girt checkerboard most often first glimpsed from the air. Most of the Aegean islands are on nodding terms with each other. The crossing from Brindisi to Corfu is brief, and (as one whimsical theologian pointed out) without interest except for determining at what precise point the *filioque* dropped out of the Creed. Vertically, the great mountains of the north still challenge our assumptions; but horizontally, in an age when jet travel and e-mail have turned the world into a parish, we move from Rome to Athens to Istanbul more easily than the ancient Spartan or Macedonian did from village to village. Fortunately, perhaps, Poseidon can still on occasion rebuke our presumption. When writing this review, I should have been on my cherished island of Lesbos; but I had to do the job in my Athens apartment, after a series of storms that turned the Aegean—still among the world's most dangerous seas—into a roiling maelstrom, canceling flights and sailings nationwide, a cogent reminder of just how Odysseus came to wash up, naked and near-dead, on the shores of Scheria.

Early Greek myth, not surprisingly, is much concerned with exploration and discovery. Jason and his Argonauts, greatly daring, threaded the Clashing Rocks and entered the Black Sea, pushing their luck all the way east to Colchis and the Golden Fleece. Once the Clashing Rocks had been passed, we are told, they ceased to clash, became fixed for ever. This was inevitable. Liminality—the establishment of fixed boundaries, of the threshold that cannot be crossed—has always been a strong magical deterrent; but once the taboo is broken, it becomes useless. As soon as sailors began to make regular passage through the Bosporos, they could see those rocks for themselves.

The story of what the Greeks shorthanded as the Inhabited World, the *oikouménê*, to begin with the eastern Mediterranean, is one of slow but steady expansion. As exploration filled in the blank spaces, the more colorful myths were pushed out further and further toward the periphery. Herodotus argued flatly that the old notion of a world ringed by the stream of Ocean was nonsense. Pindar still acknowledged the liminality imposed by the Pillars of Heracles, but this was last-ditch poetic conservatism. The Atlantic beckoned enticingly, and Phoenicians had already circumnavigated Africa, noting as they sailed westward past what we know as the Cape of Good Hope that they had the sun on their right, to the north of them—a detail that Herodotus disbelieved, but which in fact, ironically, clinches the truth of the tradition.

THIS EARLY CLASSIC instance of unwarranted intellectual skepticism crossed my mind more than once while reading these two books. Both, in very different ways, have to combat it in order to make sense of their material. J.V. Luce has the more straightforward task. As he reminds us (professionals, alas, know this all too well), "it is currently fashionable to regard the Homeric accounts of landscape and locality as 'poetic constructions,' with the implication that much of the detail is fictional and imaginary." This scholarly trend, moreover, is not restricted to Homer, nor indeed to classics. It forms a convenient hold-all for anyone disinclined to acquire facts, with a consequent preference for self-generated theory. Luce has an uphill battle to fight in his effort to vindicate the overall accuracy of Homer's topography of Troy, Ithaca, and adjacent regions; but his arguments—aided by superb color photographs—though here and there pushed too far, are fundamentally convincing.

Irad Malkin has to cope with the fashion for "poetic reconstructions" in a different and rather more complicated way. His problem is not with poetic reconstruction as such. What he argues, in effect, is that current reconstructions are too arbitrary, too limited to modern preoccupations, and not ready enough to take into account the actualities of colonization and exploration when trying to make sense of the "myths of return," largely generated by the Trojan War, in which Greek tradi-

PETER GREEN is the author most recently of a verse translation, with commentary, of Apollonios Rhodios's *Argonautika* (University of California Press).

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tion abounded. The tale of Odysseus, the original "protocolonial hero," as Malkin describes him, is the best-known of these tales, but in one respect it is atypical, since it takes him "off the map" into a frightening world of myth. Still, like other returning heroes, from Nestor to Philoctetes, Odysseus can be utilized to found settlements, to validate genealogies and ethnicities (non-Greek no less than Greek), to extend frontiers of knowledge, to underscore links made via trade or the interpenetration of beliefs and cultures.

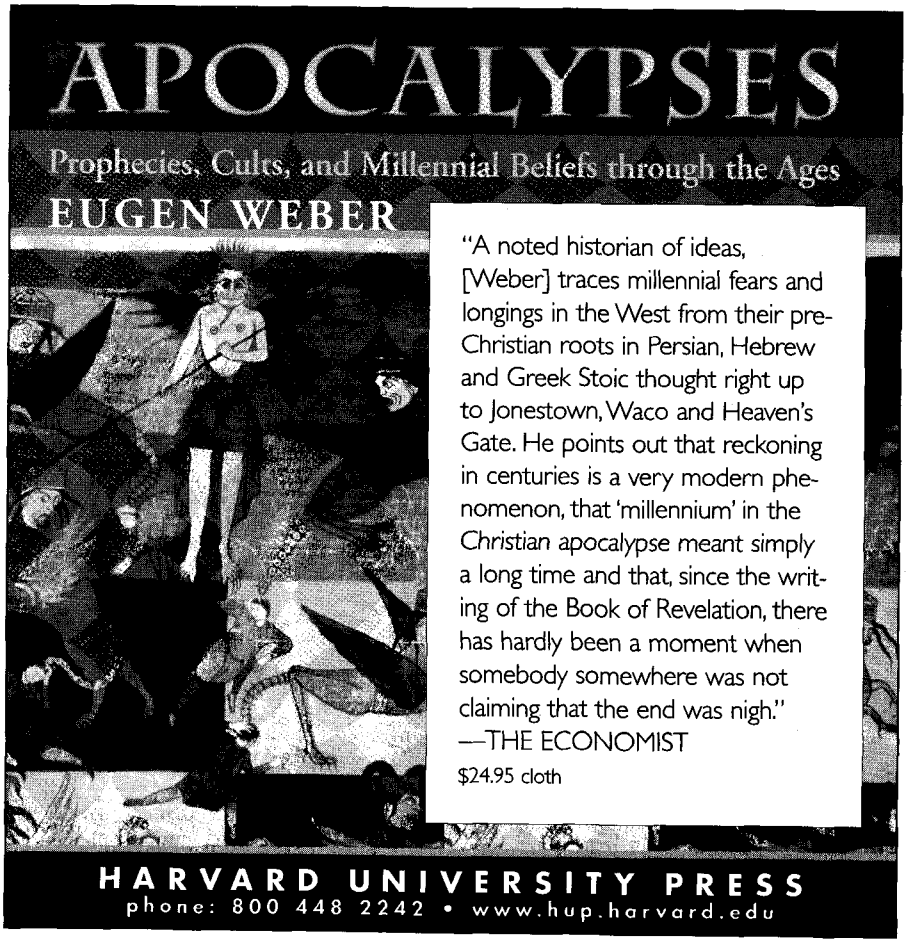
Just how, Malkin asks, did these "returns," which often in the strict sense did not return at all, least of all to their starting-point, "mediate encounters and conceptualize ethnicity and group identity" in the historical period? Attacking, like Luce, a currently fashionable, and originally French, theory of the world that divides it into Hellenes (superior, Self, *soi*) and Barbarians (inferior, Other, *autrui*), he emphasizes that "the issue relates less to a binary model of Greeks and Others than to the intricate, sometimes hybrid, mutually reflecting world of exploration, contacts, colonization and coexistence involving various Greek and native populations." Fair enough. This Ariadne's thread he proceeds to trace "through a whole spectrum of protocolonial perceptions, friendly mediating contacts, justification of expansion and annexation, and failure and decolonization." Malkin is hard work. He has (especially in his opening chapter) a dense, highly abstracted style that makes for difficult reading. For those with the stamina to stay with him, however, the rewards are great. The Western Greeks (and indeed Odysseus) will never look quite the same again.

MALKIN AND LUCE are very different kinds of scholar, and the juxtaposition of their work is enlightening in unexpected ways. Malkin's intellectual essence is cerebral, theoretical, deductive: a yacht trip around the Ionian islands from Corfu in 1992 was clearly something out of the ordinary for him, like field-work for Lévi-Strauss. For Luce, by contrast, autopsy in its strict original sense, personal inspection of evidence, and of terrain in particular, is where the intellectual process begins, and often where it ends, too. You can catch the surprise in Malkin's voice as he notes that "depending on weather conditions and visibility, everything is practically within sight and even swimming distance." He explains how the trip helped him "to visualize the geographical and maritime position of Ithaca and Corfu" in relation to their immediate surroundings. There is no suggestion that he ever went back, or that the historical problems raised by these close proximities (why wasn't the West explored and familiar much earlier?) have exercised him overmuch. For Luce, however, these experiences of the land and the sea are not serendipitous discoveries. They are the axioms of his method.

Occasionally Luce and Malkin overlap, and when they do the combination of methods can produce fascinating results. This is nowhere more apparent than in the matter of what might be called, with apologies to Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Thirteen Tripods." The locale in question is a cave on the north side of Polis Bay on Ithaca. In 1868 and 1873, a landowner named Loïzos (Luce gets the name right; Malkin calls him Louisos) found here, among other things, a bronze cauldron-tripod, afterwards melted down to avoid trouble with the authorities, but before that seen by reputable witnesses. At some point in late antiquity the roof of the cave had fallen in, thus preserving earlier artifacts that were placed there when the cave had functioned as a shrine. Access was made more difficult by a rise in the sea-level, and it was not until the early 1930s that Sylvia Benton, of the British School of Archaeology in Athens, carried out a systematic excavation.

What she found there was of considerable interest in itself, and for Homeric scholars a fascinating conundrum, still not finally resolved, and probably not resolvable. Pottery and votive offerings—some to the nymphs—showed that the cave had been in use as a shrine from the Bronze Age to the first century AD. But one inscribed sherd carried the words "My prayer to Odysseus"; and the excavating team also unearthed the fragments of twelve more splendid bronze tripods, dated to the late ninth and early eighth centuries B.C. Homeric scholars who knew their *Odyssey* were not slow to point out the extraordinary coincidence (if coincidence it was) represented by these finds.

The coincidence is this. During the sojourn of Odysseus on Scheria, King Alkinoös proposes that he and the other lords of the community, being thirteen in number, shall give the stranger guest-gifts. After Odysseus's lengthy account of his wanderings in Books 9-12, Alkinoös calls for another gift from the same source: "Come, let each of us, man by man, give him a large tripod/and cauldron...." Thirteen lords, thirteen tripods. Loïzos found one, and Sylvia Benton found twelve. Combined with that dedicatory inscription to Odysseus, such congruence between epic tradition and archaeological evidence indeed, as Luce mildly observes, "gives much food for thought."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Yet it also poses a tantalizing series of riddles. The tripods were dedicated long after the time of Odysseus (if he ever existed), but before the period in which those same scholars would agree that the Homeric poems were composed in roughly their present form. What, then, produced the coincidence? Were those thirteen tripods already a fixture in the oral tradition from the late Bronze Age on? Was the cave always associated with Odysseus, or identified as the one where the Phaeacians left him sleeping amid his guest-gifts? Did some munificent visitor, knowing all this, deliberately make an offering that recalled that scene in the *Odyssey*? Or did tripod dedications just accumulate haphazardly until the right number was reached? Did some local guide then have the bright idea of identifying them to the credulous as the very ones that accompanied Odysseus? Finally—here is the real gift to the narratologists and the deconstructionists—may it not have been the number of existing dedications that in fact dictated Homer's account?

Luce makes a very strong case for Homer having known Ithaca at first-hand. What could be more likely, in that case, than his working those thirteen tripods into his narrative, and then equipping Alkinoös with the right number of councilors as their givers? Still, as Luce rightly concedes, "such questions are easy to ask and impossible to answer with certainty." What the evidence primarily suggests to him—a literary conclusion to a topographical investigation—is "a single mastermind ordering and controlling all the manifold elements of the narrative."

On the great Homeric Question, in other words, he is a unitarian. Here he stands (correctly, I am convinced) with almost all creative writers but with far fewer analytical scholars, a striking contrast that has not attracted the attention that it deserves. He also demonstrates the crucial value of autopsy in a way that puts him right up there with legendary classical topographers such as that intrepid Victorian Colonel Leake or, in our own day, W. K. Pritchett, the famed Berkeley epigraphist, who must have worn out more pairs of boots walking every inch of Greece than any man alive.

Malkin's interests are rather different. What grabs him, when you really get down to it, are the varieties of colonial ethnic propaganda, which (then as now) depend on the creative re-shaping of myth. As an Israeli historian, he understands the pitfalls attendant upon "the use of mythological justification," and its evaluation by later scholars. Except for the evidence of archeology, he observes, could we not "easily conceive of someone a few centuries hence arguing forcefully that the relevant verses in Genesis were interpolated during the third quarter of the twentieth century by nationalist religious Jews to support irredentist claims that the earlier pragmatic, secular, and socialist-oriented Zionists had never taken too seriously?"

Perhaps only those familiar with past work done on early Mediterranean exploration and colonization, and its theories, will appreciate what a barbed comment this is. One of the few virtues of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* was the uncomfortable reminder of just what a packet of political and ethnic prejudices anyone studying colonization brought to the job, from the friendly paternalism of those brought up to believe in the British Raj to the racist fantasies generated by De Gobineau and his admirers.

On the other hand, we all should be uncomfortably conscious today, with the violence in the Balkans as a horrible object-lesson, of just where myths of origins and belonging can take us. *The Returns of Odysseus* is, at one level, an immensely learned clearing operation in the arcana of classical scholarship; but its subject-matter makes it, perhaps more importantly, an all-too-relevant tract for the times, a splendid refutation of the current populist notion that high-level research in the humanities should be dismissed as obsolete mandarinism.

The Greek word *nostos* means, roughly, "homeward return." Returning heroes, as Malkin asserts, were not personalized as *Nostoi* (nor does Gregory Nagy, where cited for this irritating affectation, in fact say so); but the idea of *nostos* in connection with Mediterranean exploration was indeed closely tied up with the subsequent adventures of Greek heroes, Odysseus in particular, after the Trojan War. There has been a tendency, among historians and literary critics alike, to keep myth and actuality apart when investigating this phenomenon. What Malkin sees, with commendable clarity, is that they are inseparable:

> From the ninth century B.C. on, Greeks sailed, explored, established guest-friendship (*xenia*) relations, raided, traded, and colonized on the coasts beyond Ithaca. These were real people, doing concrete things, observing coasts and populations in the Ionian, Adriatic, and Tyrrhenian Seas, but they perceived the reality that they encountered there through screens woven of both experience and myth. Myths, especially about the *Nostoi*—the returning heroes from the Trojan War—were projected onto new lands, articulating landscapes, genealogies, and ethnicities. *Nostos* myths provided cultural and ethnic mediation with non-Greeks and, once integrated, often came to provide the terms of self-perception for native populations.

What follows is an erudite, richly documented, and stringently argued demonstration of this thesis. It tracks Odysseus beyond Ithaca, the point of no return, the way-station to the West, the offshore island by Epiros—Cavafy's source of the *kalè taxídhi*, the "wonderful journey"—to the Greek cities of South Italy, to Pithekoussai and the Etruscans. It throws in Nestor, Philoctetes, Diomedes, and other "returners" for good measure. It is itself, in every sense, a *kalè taxídhi*.

Along the way a whole series of suggestive notions awaits the alert reader. Malkin argues that most of the "historical" elements—as opposed to the "off-the-map" elements—in the *Odyssey* were well-known in the ninth century B.C., and may indeed depend on Bronze Age oral traditions—a view that Luce, I am sure, would enthusiastically endorse. What Malkin calls "ethnogenesis" generated myths galore in antiquity without any sense of nationalism—which in this context is a modern import, and still the cause of untold tension between *kratos* and *ethnos*, between state and people. (Panhellenism was something quite different, a kind of ethnic collectivism.)

There are lessons to be learned here. Perhaps the most important is that mere facts enjoy very low priority when establishing any kind of traditional authentication for ancestry, language, cult, or territorial claims. Malkin's book abounds in endless varieties of manipulated or revamped evidence to bring the past into line with current requirements: did these people consciously know what they were doing? Were they deliberate (and cynical) propagandists, or was the past for them a kind of innocent and malleable plasma, to be shaped to one's needs and then firmly believed in when shaped? When the Etruscans took over Odysseus and Aeneas together, when Rome absorbed the second but not the first, when everyone modified and added to the genealogies as they needed, and varied foundation legends, and reinterpreted hero-cults, and changed boundaries and nationalities and territorial claims, where did faith end and politics take over?

The case of modern Greece offers disquieting answers. Even highly educated and intelligent individuals, academics included, seem quite capable of not only

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invoking the most patently absurd historical myths, but, worse, of actually believing them. One of the hardest notions to swallow in Malkin's analysis is that of ethnic groups that brazenly (as it would seem) borrow or invent a suitable past, and then, with all apparent sincerity, treat it as gospel. Ancient naïveté, you might think.

But look now at a book that lately generated considerable interest, not least when Cambridge University Press backed out of publishing it, on the alleged excuse that to do so might put the lives of its representatives in Greece at risk. I refer to Anastasia Karakasidou's *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990*, which the University of Chicago Press published a few years ago. It describes, in chilling detail, the use of "Hellenization" as an instrument for the eradication and the absorption of minority cultures in Greece. My point here is how successful the process has been. In only two generations, a group of Macedonian Slavs living north of Thessaloniki not only became convinced of their Hellenic ancestry, not only saw it as stretching back to antiquity, but became extremely upset when Karakasidou started confronting them with a few historical facts to the contrary.

What has become known as the Macedonian Question—were they Greeks or weren't they Greeks?—abounds in this kind of paradox. It is a given in Greece, for example, that Macedonian as a language is a chimera. Never mind that a Macedonian grammar was published in Athens in 1925. But when Pope John Paul II's Christmas message in 1991 included a greeting in Macedonian, Greeks took him to task for using the "nonexistent Macedonian tongue." And every improbable mythic device that Malkin lists for the archaic world, every bizarre or irrational affectation, is certainly alive and well in the Balkans today. Indeed, in one respect antiquity was a clear improvement on the present imbroglio: it had not yet sampled the heady joys of religious intolerance, which, like it or not, has been one of the main forces driving the disaster in Kosovo.

Current preoccupations thus lend peculiar interest to what might otherwise seem distant, even arid. But these myths and movements, these cross-currents of language, now betray, even after nearly two millennia, a fearfully familiar urgency. Linguistic variants—as in the name of Odysseus, where the Corinthian "Olytteus" generated the Italian "Ulysses"—hint at more widespread emigrations than have hitherto been supposed. Epiros and Illyria, later regarded by many as "barbarian," seem to have exported fundamental Greek ethnic patterns to the West, including the Western name *Graikoi* for what the Greeks themselves called Hellenes. Etruscans took over Greek *nostos* myths with enthusiasm: for them, "the Homeric epics were not only attractive aesthetically and socially but provided a 'full past.'" Greek myths offered genealogical charters for some highly un-Greek princely families: Odysseus as companion to Aeneas, as progenitor of those Italic characters Agrius and Latinus, "conforms to a peripheral vision of Italic peoples as seen from the area of the Bay of Naples." Nestor and Philoctetes generated foundation-myths all round the heel of Italy. Diomedes turns up at a surprising number of non-Greek sites.

Yet behind the politics and the propaganda, the use of mythic ancestry to validate civic or ethnic pretensions, one senses an older, more tentative, less confident and less pragmatic past, when the wonders that lay in the uncharted West had not been tamed or labeled, and the firm distinction between fact and fantasy had by no means been established. Charybdis and Scylla might have been located somewhere in the Straits of Messina, but their nature was no more precisely determined than that of the Cyclops. Above all, the one Western journey carefully ignored by both Malkin and Luce is the journey of Odysseus to Hades. It raises, in every sense, too many ghosts.

In later times, the hereafter was to beckon enticingly for those deprived in this world; but not in the *Odyssey*. Never again in European literature was there to be so resounding a declaration in favor of life on earth over the life that followed. What Homer called the "weak heads of the dead," flitting in a gray underworld, needing warm blood to revivify them, are the most sheerly negative denizens of any afterlife known to us. Achilles would rather be a hired hand on earth than reign as a king among the dead. This is the joyful creed, preserved in oral tradition, of a Bronze Age aristocracy that loved life with a manic fierceness, and treasured it all the more for its brevity and perils. "As is the generation of leaves, so is that of men": this is one of the most poignant moments in the *Iliad*. What on earth happened, during a brief century or two, to replace this attitude with the crippling pessimism of the Greek city-states, summed up in that famous phrase "Call no man happy till he's dead"? That still remains one of the most tantalizing enigmas bequeathed to us by antiquity. ■

The Lincoln Bedroom

I have confidence, Peacock, and my eyes are soft.
The chairs, Queen Anne, the tables of night,
  the beaded lamps, square pillows, more
symmetric than the human heart,
headboard of leaf like nothing
that can ever form.

As you love this bed it makes you think
of the other bed,
so short they had to lay him out
diagonal. The paintings of people,
ghosts coated with oil.
But then to one side
the chair of a child, who'd faced the bed
and answered questions.

Ceiling high as the thought of elephants,
great living flowers, a plate the size of a head.
Glass globes, an even ten, you can't stop counting.
Mirror, too, that doesn't reflect
so much as suck,
with curtains, metaphors for resemblance
smeared with love, a marble table,
four sad books
resting there like people
fresh out of the loveseat, pale, pretending
the rug is the sea, it looks like something strong and wet,
the bed a big black battleship, only
a hockey puck black—if only
you could catch it—this is where
I was without my normal
hesitation, almost
alone, the stomach swelling like a sponge.

"There's two of us," I wrote to myself,
afraid it might seem loud.

Donald Berger

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Books Without Borders

By KARL MILLER

An Equal Music by Vikram Seth

(Broadway Books, 381 pp., $25)

THE POET RONSARD once began a poem by saying that in sixteenth-century France writers were running about in their abundance like ants. Not all of them, he hastened to add, were any good. On March 22, the Delhi magazine *Outlook* said the same of teeming India. Indian writers in English are making waves abroad, "with premier publishers and serious money chasing them on both sides of the Atlantic," and with "all kinds" of subcontinentals "belting out novels," sending in to publishing houses long works in longhand, and inquiring about large advances and a possible nomination for the Booker Prize. A vast hive of activity. Eat your heart out, Ronsard.

The magazine carried a piece by Pankaj Mishra that corroborates this account by supplying evidence of the excitements and tensions predictable in the situation that it evokes. Hailed in the British press as "the worst review ever in an Indian magazine"—meaning the most devastating—Mishra's piece is an attack on Salman Rushdie and his new novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. And, whether by accident or by design, Vikram Seth's new novel has appeared at the same time, and has been placed in the ring with Rushdie's book by newspapers hoping for a grudge contest.

Mishra thinks that Rushdie's novel is a kind of anti-literature. An editorial banner over his article describes the novel as a "descent into literary dementia." Rushdie's fictions are seen by Mishra as prone to authorial homily, and his ascendance among Indian writers in English is thought to have led to a blithe liberation "from such considerations as economy, structure, suspense, irony, plausibility of events, coherence of character, psychological motivation, narrative transitions—in short, everything that makes the novel an art form." Rushdie's new novel rounds off what he has always been doing: "story, characters, drama [have] come to resemble aborted sublimations of the storyteller's obsessions, his prejudices and biases." Rushdie has gone West, Mishra explains. He is "the colonial child who has had to re-invent himself for the West." He is also said to have set off in pursuit of the non-English practices of Grass and García Márquez, having declined what some might regard as the classical English novel form, based on character and plot.

At the end of Mishra's article comes the information that his own novel, *The Romantics*, has been sold around the world for half a million dollars. This information speaks of a robust internationalism, of a literary world in which India, Britain, America, Latin America, and Europe are mutually responsive. And it joins with the spite communicated by the article in presenting Mishra as a rival, fresh to the field, a challenger out to put down the resident master. Omissions and distortions were therefore to be expected of the piece. The novel as soliloquy, as autobiography, need not be spurious, need not be a recipe for transience; but Mishra implies the opposite, and can scarcely bear to mention either the power and invention of Rushdie's language or the charm of the internal stories—complete with character and plot—that proliferate in the books he writes.

Contemporary Indian and Anglo-Indian writing, moreover, can hardly be reduced to a stand-off between soliloquy and structure. The new Indian writers in English display a variety of approach that testifies to their vitality and to the value of their achievement. Neither Amit Chaudhuri nor Ardashir Vakil are acolytes of Rushdie; nor do they diverge from him in the same direction. They are no closer to him than they are to the old master Narayan, from whom no writer could be more different, stylistically, than the newcomer Arundhati Roy.

For all its simplifications, however, Mishra's piece has the merit of raising issues which are often ignored, certainly in Britain, where Rushdie is a household name, and where he was already casting spells before his wizardry fell afoul of Muslim fanaticism. And the issues that it raises are also relevant to the writings of Vikram Seth, which are far from deficient in plot, structure, and character. The endings that monologue, and fictional autobiography in most of its many forms, may necessarily have to postpone are reached in Seth.

SETH'S WORKS COME IN different shapes and sizes, but they share a distinctive lightness of touch. They sail to the same Sethian breezes. His long poem *The Golden Gate* appeared in 1986, five years after *Midnight's Children*. It is an emulation of Pushkin and Byron, and could be called a romantic but not a confessional work. A Regency gaiety and mockery were applied to a sexual-revolutionary singles' San Francisco, where his teacher of the time, Donald Davie, at Stanford, is said to have frowned on the result. Davie is not the only senior English poet to have felt that Seth's verse, or some of it, wouldn't do. But then *The Golden Gate* is designed to be disapproved of by seniors, and it has given great pleasure. Seth is a festive writer, with an unexpired boyish innocence, and lots of allegro in what he gets up to. Not everyone likes that sort of thing.

Seven years after this long poem came a really long novel whose title played on the idea of acceptability. *A Suitable Boy* is as fast as it is large: over a thousand pages of buoyancy and dynastic chronicle, and of information about Indian life. This lucid, graceful, Gangetically copious book has also been disapproved of by one or two senior figures, and greatly enjoyed elsewhere. Admirers have spoken of the novel as Austenian, because of such features, presumably, as its concern with the mating of a sprightly girl in the neighborhood of the "cad" Maan: but it is closer to Murasaki's eleventh-century *Tale of Genji* than it is to *Pride and Prejudice*.

Scope, speed, and a lyrical simplicity do nothing to inhibit portraiture, as the nonchalance of two sentences about Maan might indicate: "A later flame, however brightly it burned, did not douse an earlier one in Maan's heart. He continued to feel sudden throbs of warmth and goodwill at the thought of almost any of them." There is an echo there of the Regency language and sentiment to which Seth can seem drawn. Another sentence forecasts the double plot of his next novel, the present one. A lachrymose widow is moved by a Hindi film, which proves very sad: "the

KARL MILLER, a former professor of English at University College, London, is the author most recently of *Dark Horses*, a memoir.

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songs were sad too, and it was not clear whether it was the piteous fate of the blind singer or the tenderness of the love story that had most affected her."

Seth is one of the Indian writers who have gone West. He attended an English public school, as did Rushdie, and they have both in their time been taken, or mistaken, for an exotic species of English public schoolboy. He currently inhabits both Delhi and London. All this shows in the shape of the seamless versatility that registers at all levels of his work. There are no Indians in *An Equal Music*, and it has as its first-person narrator an emotional man, Michael Holme, from Rochdale in unemotional Lancashire, who plays the violin in an aspiring string quartet, the Maggiore.

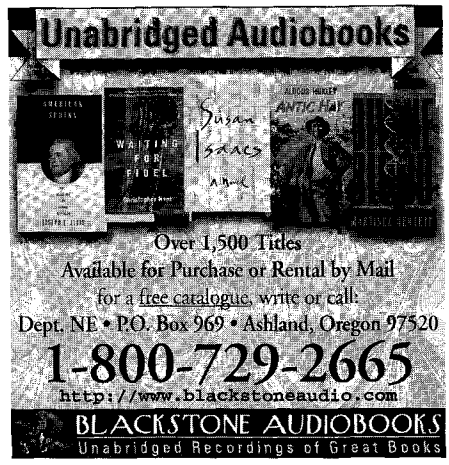
EARLY IN THE NOVEL, Holme is in bed with one of his pupils, Virginie from France, who is forbidden to bite his shoulder—"it'll end very badly"—and who bites his shoulder. The exchange might seem boring, in extraction, but it isn't boring at all, and it isn't inauthentic. Her Englishman then plays the mad dog by choosing to go off and swim in Hyde Park's daunting pool, the Serpentine, which drains subterraneanly into the Thames. Not every Londoner knows that, but Seth does, just as he knows that London buses bound for the same destination travel bunched up in caravans, as if across the Sahara desert, so that the citizens have to wait for hours for the one they want. Michael accuses Virginie of "ODing on your English idioms." This is not something that Michael does. He calls his mother Mum in ways that seem right, and it is no less English than Indian of him to tell his agent that "mum's the word." There is more to this than knowingness, or ventriloquism.

Several years before the love-bite, Michael had had an affair with a pianist named Julia when they were students in Vienna, and had broken it off, for reasons that involved the strains of his relationship with his professor, a masterclass depressive bully. Julia now turns up in London, glimpsed on a bus and confronted at one of his concerts. The pair had seemingly lost touch since Vienna—mysteriously, since London's classical music community is large and complex but hardly a haystack. The affair is resumed. But Michael has discovered that she is married, and has a child, and he is soon to discover that she is going deaf. Michael tells a member of the quartet, with which she is due to perform, about her deafness. He tells Julia that "a question of trust" required him to do this: "I couldn't look at him and keep lying." She replies: "What do you think I have to do at home about you?"

Vikram Seth has sometimes resembled the daring young man on the flying trapeze whose falls are predicted and pronounced, and in certain quarters this new novel has been pronounced a fall. A likeness to Erich Segal's *Love Story* has been detected. There may also be those who will think that the book is touristic for going on about its visits to interesting foreign cities, for pondering in Venice, as many visitors have done, Carpaccio's *Saint George and the Dragon*. Michael's quartet has been blamed for ignoring the modern repertoire in favor of Bach, Mozart, Schubert, and Beethoven; a modern work, a modern din, overheard by the narrator, is felt by him to profane Vivaldi's Venetian church. For those who think that there is a competition between Rushdie and Seth, and that the young may be on Rushdie's side, the rock music in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* might be deemed morally superior to the classical music element in *An Equal Music*; but I don't believe that Seth's attachment to traditional form, in this respect and in others, is a grave objection to his book.

INDEED, IT CAN be argued that it serves the book well. The good news about *An Equal Music* is that it possesses more than one of the "classical" properties that Mishra opposed to the novel of soliloquy. It has structure, suspense, plausibility (the protagonist's musical colleagues are entirely convincing), and it could be considered richer in these properties than romances usually are. But is it a romance? In any negative sense, only intermittently. The first-person narrative is neither wishful nor self-indulgent. It is less dependent than readers might anticipate on the pathos of Julia's deafness, and the loving fax to her Bostonian banker husband, lit upon by Michael, owes more of its impact to realism than to romance. A wide readership may once more enjoy what some critics and colleagues have failed to enjoy. Here as before, Seth is both aerial and musical—Aeolian, you might say, in the language of the Romantic period. The music in the book is more than subject-matter: there are moments when it is possible to imagine it set to music, or versified in the manner of Pushkin.

I have been writing as a British reviewer, in an American journal, about an Indian writer writing in English about the English. Such activities have their place in a long history of cross-cultural influence and affinity, and they are not about to come to an end. Nor are they about to win over the world's cleansers, anxious to keep people out and other people in, to keep them from going west, or east, or wherever they wish to go. ■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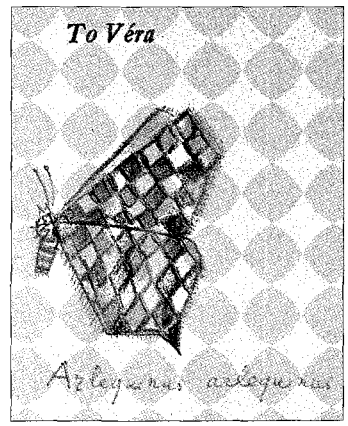
NEW YORK DIARIST

Eggs à la Nabocoque

STEP INTO ROOM 316 OF THE 42ND Street library any day of the week and you will find a dozen or more people slowly making their way through "Nabokov Under Glass," a salute to the writer, who was born 100 years ago, on April 23, 1899. Nabokov enthusiasts are a varied lot—including the young and the old, the straitlaced and the very casually dressed—but I expect that they are all mesmerized, as I am, by a show of rare books and manuscripts that makes them laugh out loud. Pedantry has never been quite so exhilaratingly—and weirdly—hilarious as when Nabokov gives letter grades to all the short stories listed in the tables of contents of *The Best American Short Stories* (1946) and *55 Short Stories From The New Yorker* (1949). In the *New Yorker* anthology, the teacher grants himself an A+ and also has one for J.D. Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." Jean Stafford receives a B, Mary McCarthy and John O'Hara are tied at a C+, Peter Taylor gets a D and Frank O'Connor a D-. Of his own performance, Nabokov may have felt that practice makes perfect, considering that, three years earlier, in *The Best American Short Stories*, he had given himself a mere A, while Lionel Trilling rated a B-, Taylor a C+, and Elizabeth Hardwick an E.

THERE'S MUCH MORE OF THIS EXQUISITE (and sometimes nasty) fun. Not to be missed is a list of items to be taken on a visit to see Edmund Wilson on Cape Cod and several sheets filled with "Favorite Hates." But what's so endearing about these perfectly calibrated explosions of silliness is that they are so evidently—so nakedly—a release valve for a man with a merciless, relentless faith in the literary endeavor. Nabokov's grading system may have been meant to tell the world that just about nobody wrote as well as V.N., but mostly the show is about Nabokov grading Nabokov, pushing himself to be clearer, more precise, more elegant. Nabokov wrote his later novels on index cards, and a series of cards for *Transparent Things*, on which, in pencil with innumerable erasures and crossings out, he developed a glitteringly perfect description of a pencil, has to rate as some sublime example of the craftsman contemplating the most basic tool of his trade.

SINCE MIRRORINGS, DOUBLINGS, DOPPELgängers, and shades are at the core of Nabokov's art, it's natural that this glorious exhibition should be shadowed by a smaller, quirkier show, called "Revised Evidence," at Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, 19 East 76th Street. Nabokov adorned his wife's copies of his books with elaborate colored pencil drawings of butterflies, and most of these are in Horowitz's exhibit and in an accompanying catalog, *Véra's Butterflies*. Some are, as we are told in the catalog, sly variants on real specimens, with "resplendent new markings and colors, always more luxuriant than in any of the genus's actual butterflies." Other drawings are madcap inventions, such as the *Arlequinus arlequinus*, right out of the commedia dell'arte, that Nabokov created for his last novel, *Look at the Harlequins!*



COURTESY THE ESTATE OF VLADIMIR NABOKOV

NABOKOV'S BUTTERFLY DRAWINGS ARE central to this show, but there's lots more to see. Horowitz is a man who revels in the near-absurdist heights to which bibliomania can be carried, and, in the artist Barbara Bloom, who curated "Revised Evidence," he has found just the person to turn his elegantly appointed offices into a romantically conceptual fantasy on Nabokovian themes. In "Revised Evidence," Bloom is the demi-aesthete romancing the ultimate aesthete. Spun around Horowitz's Nabokov holdings are Bloom's jokes and aperçus: walls covered with black silhouetted images of Nabokov's butterfly drawings, manuscripts, and meticulously revised galleys; cases of butterflies specially arranged to echo themes in the novels; a Bloom-designed rug that reproduces the cover of the Olympia Press edition of *Lolita*, complete with Nabokov's red pencil notations; and little Bloomesque fictions, among them several doctored copies of the books. Bloom's earlier meditations on collecting and cataloging, seen in various gallery and museum shows, have never convinced me: there didn't seem to be all that much there there. This time, however, she has a winner.

BLOOM IS PLAYFULLY DISSECTING AND embroidering Nabokov, activities that she is not wrong to believe are in his spirit. Everywhere you look during this centenary season, enthusiasts are pursuing byways with an energy that they surely regard as Nabokovian. Stacy Schiff's new biography of Véra (Random House) is an attempt to tease the muse out from behind the master, but she keeps receding into his biography. Coming out this fall is *Nabokov's Blues: The Scientific Odyssey of a Literary Genius* by Kurt Johnson and Steve Coates (Zoland), a full-scale evaluation of Nabokov's standing as a lepidopterist. Next year, Beacon Press will bring out a collection of all the butterfly writings, including notes for a projected work on the butterfly and art.

THE CENTENNIAL IS A FINE TIME TO EXAMine the pieces of the Nabokov puzzle, but, of course, what brings us back to Nabokov is his way of finding the pattern in the game, of reconstructing what he's deconstructing. A loony high point of the New York Public Library show is a 1972 manuscript titled "Eggs à la Nabocoque," in which he explains how to boil an egg—the most ordinary act, now taxonomized and dramatized. "Boil water in a saucepan (bubbles mean it is boiling!)," he begins. A few lines later, the two eggs have slipped "*soundlessly* into the (boiling) water. Consult your wristwatch. Stand over them with a spoon preventing them (they are apt to roll) from knocking against the damned side of the pan. If, however, an egg cracks in the water (now bubbling like mad) and starts to disgorge a cloud of white stuff like a medium at an old fashioned seance, fish it out and throw it away."

EVEN WHEN IT COMES TO BOILING AN EGG, Nabokov has strong opinions. This insistence on letting everybody know what you think must be one of a number of traits that endear him to all the New Yorkers and New Yorkers-in-spirit who visit the 42nd Street show. In what other city do so many people strive for that Nabokovian combination of toughness and romanticism? Nabokov knew all about turmoil and change, but he believed that, with sufficient mind, imagination, and energy, you could turn the confusions into something good. No wonder New Yorkers, who regard daily life as a mesmerizing chaos that they'll be able to master just as soon as they get a grip, are among his most ardent fans.

JED PERL

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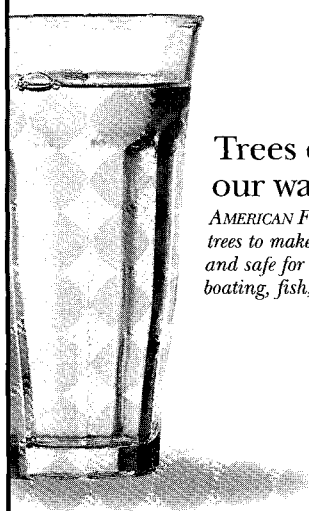

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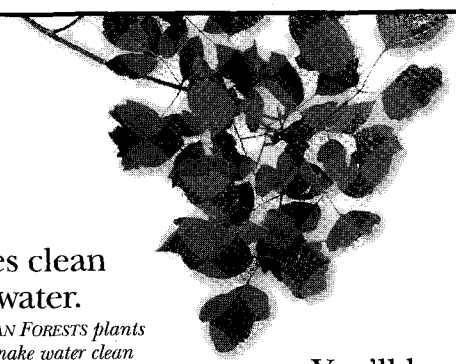

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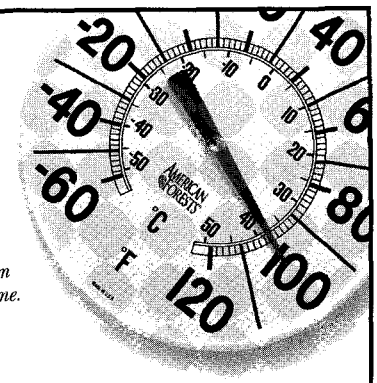

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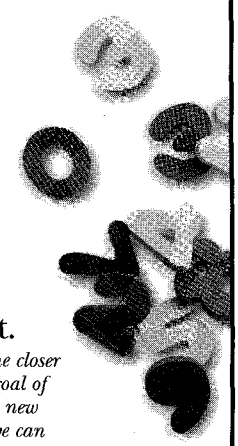

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American Forests plants trees in neighborhoods to improve quality of life, build community spirit, and reduce crime.

Trees save money.

American Forests plants city trees to reduce the cost of controlling stormwater, reduce home energy use, and improve property values.

It's easy!

Planting trees with American Forests is just a phone call—or a mouse click—away.

Every $1 plants a tree. Call 800-545-TREE now.

Plant 25 trees for $25 and receive a personalized certificate for you or your gift recipient. Call now or plant trees online at **www.americanforests.org**.

American Forests®
People caring for trees and forests since 1875

American Forests Global ReLeaf® 2000

Global ReLeaf is the tree-planting campaign of American Forests, our nation's oldest nonprofit citizen conservation organization.

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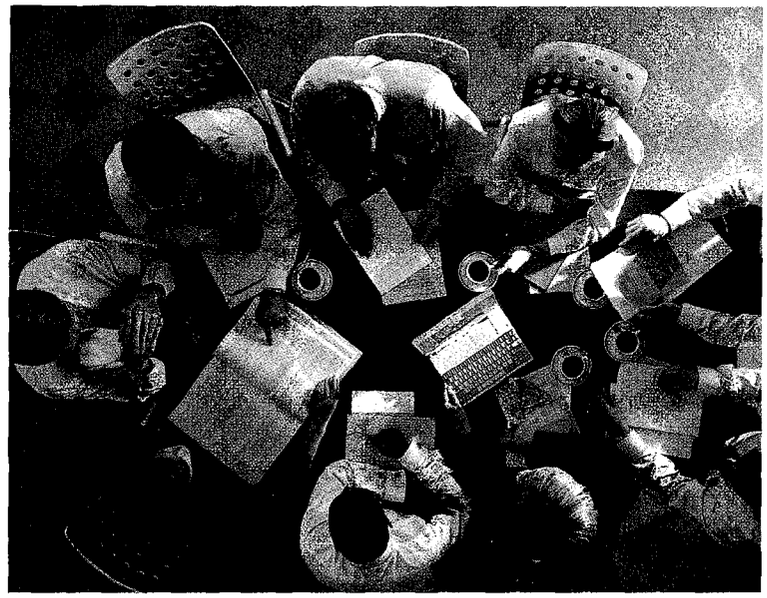

Can you believe it? They're actually organizing The Coalition For Higher Mortgage Costs.

Earlier in the year, we reduced the amount of mortgage insurance a borrower needs to own a home, which means even more families can live the American Dream of homeownership. After all, lowering mortgage costs and expanding homeownership is our mission at Fannie Mae. And it's working. Last year alone, Fannie Mae and our lender partners found enough innovative ways to cut costs so that over four million families were able to own their own homes.

But some mortgage insurance companies want to keep us from cutting costs for consumers. They are actually forming a coalition to do just that. So over the next few months when you hear about an organization lobbying Congress to "rein in" Fannie Mae or to initiate some new homeownership tax, you'll know who it is.

They might not actually call themselves The Coalition For Higher Mortgage Costs; they'll probably come up with some other name to obscure their real intent. But whatever they go by, their desire to keep us from doing our job will increase the cost of homeownership and keep families from living the American Dream.

We don't believe mortgage costs should go up. Do you?

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